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Roosevelt Island: Completing an Urban Community

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ABSTRACT

The thesis is an architectural exploration of what makes neighborhood and community at two scales: at the scale of the city (macrocosm), represented by the urban plan; and at the scale of the individual (microcosm), represented by the concept of house and housing. At these two contrasting scales, the main focus of the study was:

To explore how an urban design can shape community:

- How can a sense of place be created?
- How can a sense of the individual be created?
- The role of the public and private realm in a community.
- The role of urban fabric and green space in the making of a neighborhood/community.

To explore the role housing plays in the making of urban fabric/neighborhood

- How can a housing prototype influence the architectural scale, quality and character of the urban fabric?
- How can a housing prototype be manipulated to create urban fabric, compose urban blocks and define street?
- The role of a housing prototype in creating civic and green space.
- The role of the a housing prototype in defining community.

These two main issues of urban planning and housing prototypes, and the set of questions they generated, became the framework for investigating a plan for completing the development of Roosevelt Island in New York City.

ROOSEVELT ISLAND:
COMPLETING AN URBAN COMMUNITY

Investigating the Role of Housing &
Green Space in the Making of Neighborhood

by

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PREFACE

This book is dedicated to the memory of Werner Seligmann, a man who was an inspiring architect and teacher.

I am also very grateful to Professor Arthur McDonald for his encouragement and assistance in completing this book.

I would also like to thank Maxanne Resnick at the Roosevelt Island Operation Corporation for generously giving me access to their drawings, brochures and pamphlets during my visits to Roosevelt Island.

I am greatly indebted to Bob Joy, Gary McCoola, Bob Zilch and Tenée Casaccio for the opportunity they gave me to complete this work, and their active support. I am also very thankful for Jean Stark's cheerful assistance in incorporating the illustrations into the text of the book, and for Philippa Hindson's exceptional proofreading and editing talents.

And finally, I want to thank my family for their constant support and encouragement: thanks to my parents, and most of all to George.

For George, Kaitlin and Emma

INTRODUCTION

Background

My thesis exploration began with the idea to investigate how housing and urban park could combine to make a neighborhood. Initial considerations involved comparing the housing and community structures of the American urban and suburban neighborhood, as representing planning, spatial and architectural opposites as well as representing opposing definitions of community. With the urban and suburban defining polar extremes, I became interested in investigating the role of housing types in defining an alternative type of neighborhood - one that mediated between the typical high-rise apartment housing of a city, and the typical detached single-family house of the sprawl of suburbia.

In the course of researching this idea of housing and urban issues, my advisor, Dean Werner Seligmann, directed my research toward work done by the New York State Urban Development Corporation (UDC) in the 1970's. In particular, I began to investigate the low-rise, high-density housing built in projects directed by the UDC. As housing prototypes, these projects were interesting examples for the architectural and social ideals they embodied.

The UDC sponsored the development of the low-rise, high-density housing as an alternative to the many high-rise tower public housing projects that had been built in America's larger cities. This high-rise housing, while providing a place for people to live, had not succeeded in fostering a sense of community at either the urban scale or the scale of the individual.

From an urban viewpoint, the high-rise towers did little to spatially define a larger urban structure of street and block that help define a neighborhood. These projects were also usually detached from the landscape; any green space associated with the housing tower was generally no more than left over space between the towers, and did not define a sense of either the public or private realm. For an individual in the community, the inherent scale of this housing was too large to provide a sense of identity and security.

In comparison, the low-rise, high-density housing projects I researched contained several qualities important to making an urban fabric and a neighborhood (See Figure 1). First was the ability of low-rise, high-density housing to create an identifiable urban structure of street

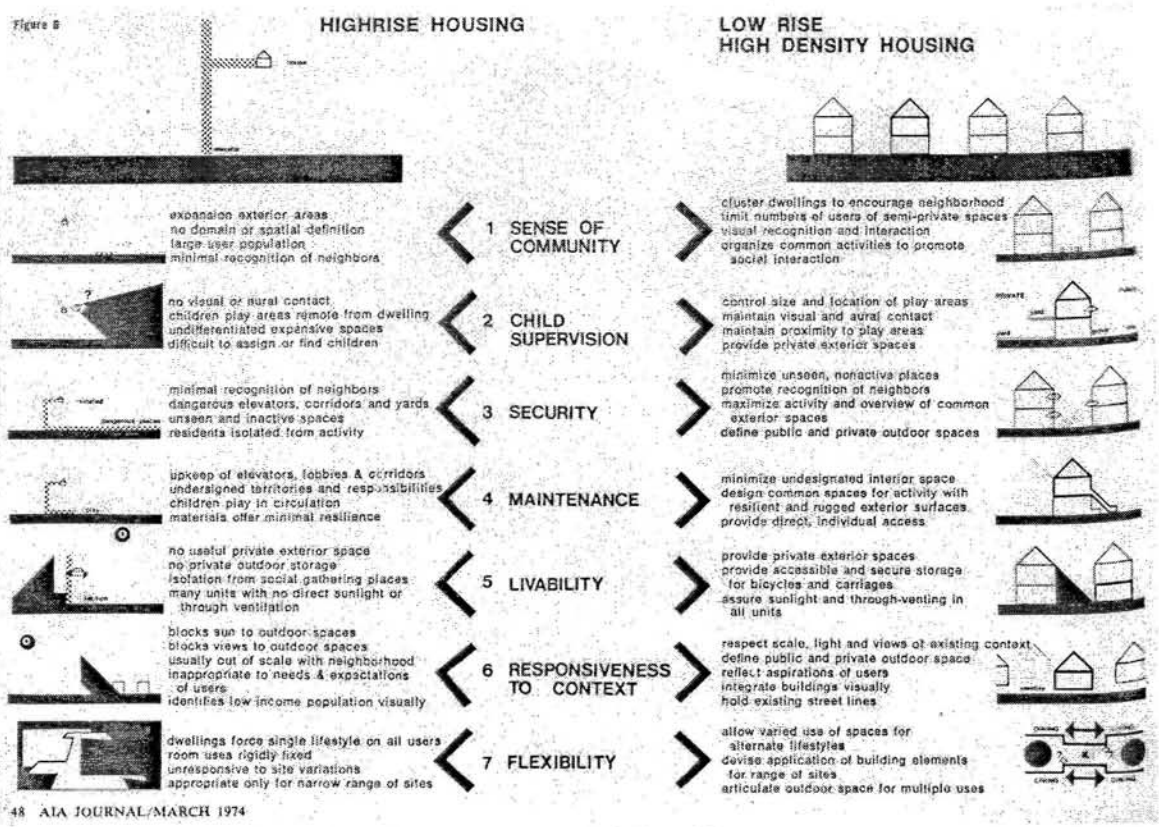

Figure 1: High Rise vs. Low Rise, AIA Journal, March 1974, p. 48.

and block at a human scale, while also giving an individual an identifiable "house" within the block and neighborhood. These prototypes also displayed the potential for defining public and private green space within a neighborhood. The low-rise, high-density housing also contained other ideas I believed were important to defining a community: a scale and planning attitude that reinforces a sense of security for the individual, and creation of an environment attractive to the elderly and families (See Figure 2).

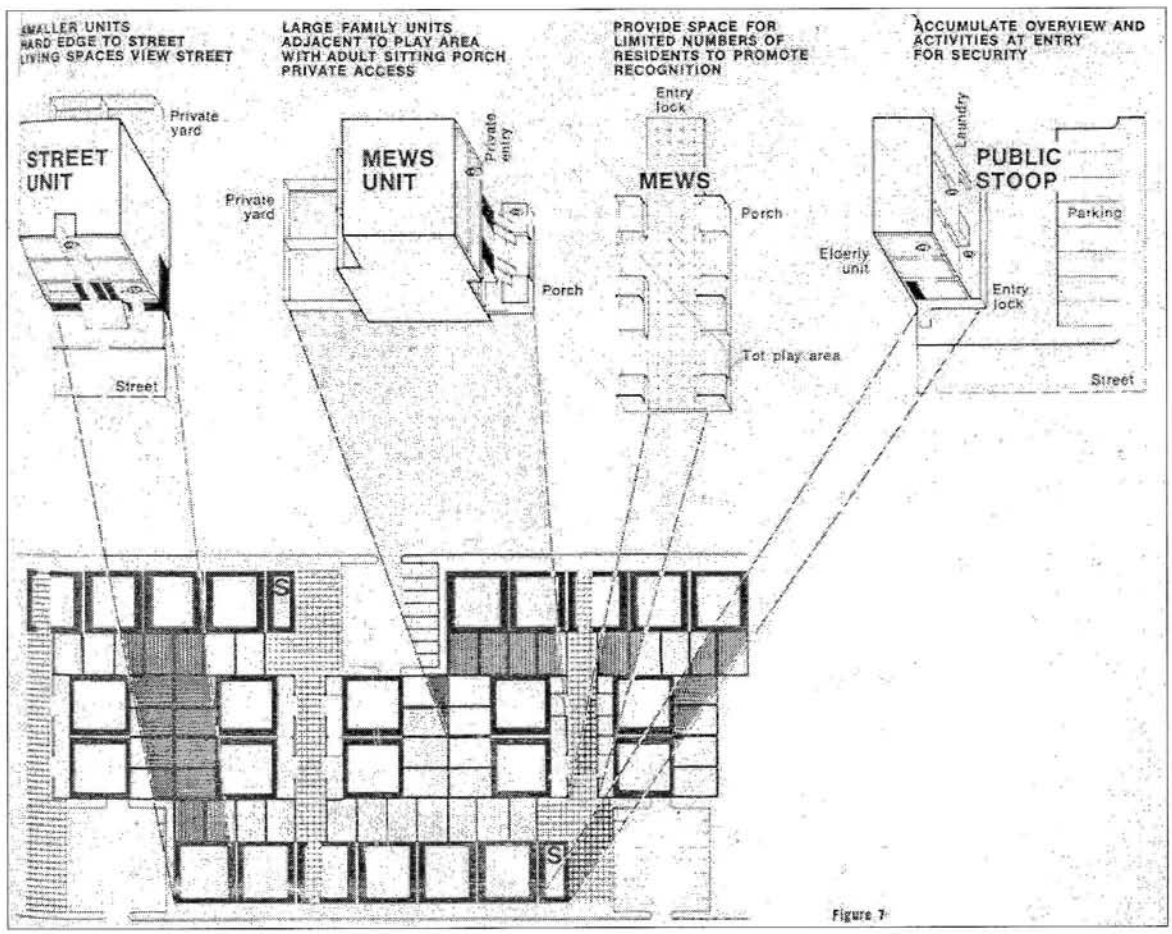

Figure 2: Diagram, Low-Rise High Density Housing

From a social perspective, the UDC projects also incorporated government funding programs to provide housing for low-to- moderate and middle-income families within the same project, to promote socially and economically integrated neighborhoods. Because of these qualities, I determined the low-rise, high-density housing prototype would be an ideal means to investigate how an urban fabric and a sense of neighborhood and community could be created.

During this phase of the research, I also discovered the urban planning and housing projects the UDC had sponsored for the development of Roosevelt Island in New York City (Figure 3). I became very intrigued with Roosevelt Island's potential as a site to explore the urban and housing issues of the thesis.

Figure 3: USGS Map: Manhattan, Roosevelt Island and Queens

Roosevelt Island was very compelling from both an urban planning and architectural viewpoint. "It is a planner's dream - a long sliver of an island located in the narrow channel of the East River in New York City (Figure 4). It has magnificent views of the Manhattan skyline, immediately to the west and not-quite-so-magnificent views of Queens immediately to the east."[1] Roosevelt Island is a long, slender island, about two miles long and eight hundred feet wide. Directly adjacent to Manhattan's East Side, the southern tip of the island starts at 51st Street, while the northern end stretches to approximately 86th Street. The Queensborough Bridge traverses Roosevelt Island at 63rd street, but provides no vehicular connections. In the late 1980s, the only public transportation connection was via a tramway running parallel to the

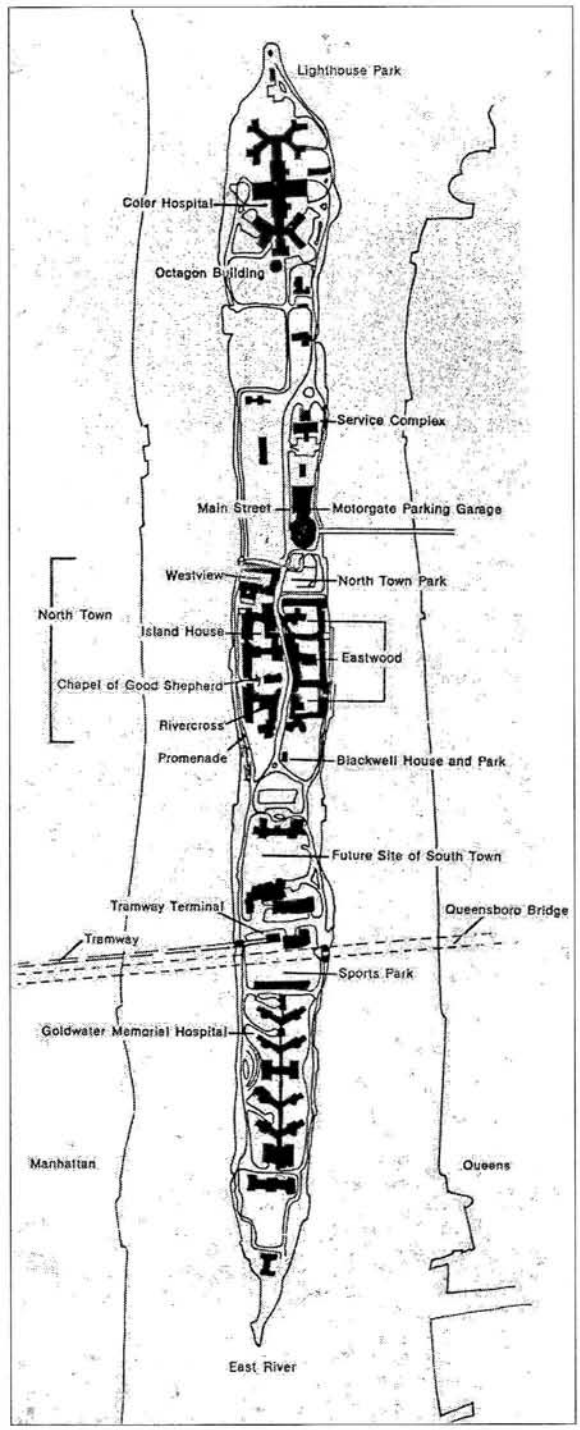

Figure 4: Plan, Existing Conditions of the Island

[1] John S. Margolies, "New Town for New York", *Architectural Forum*, 131: 40, October 1969.

Queensborough bridge, between Manhattan at 63rd Street and a nondescript tram station on the island. The tram ride is an exceptional experience, affording some of the best views of Manhattan (Figures 5 and 6). And the only vehicular connection is from the Queen's side of the island, with a bridge connecting to Roosevelt Islands's Motorgate parking garage.

Its history and development were also intriguing. Originally a place for New York City's undesirables, a small portion of the island now housed a planned community of about 6,800 people which is integrated economically, racially, and aspires to house the young and old. "Roosevelt Island is like no other place in New York City, and like few others anywhere. This island...contains a couple of hospitals, some magnificent, deteriorating landmarks, and a relic of the very best hopes of the 1960's: a "new town in town" that combines social goals with strong urban design, yielding a mixed-income neighborhood of genuine diversity...Here low-to-moderate income and upper-middle-

Figure 5: Aerial View, Manhattan in Background

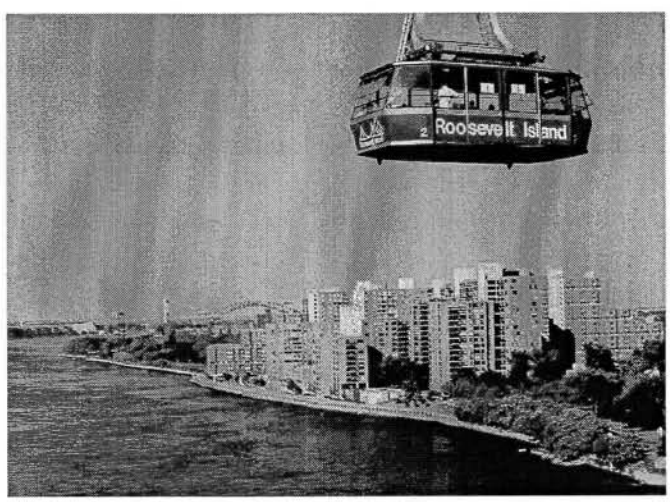

Figure 6: Aerial View

class New Yorkers really do live side by side, sharing parks and open space, river-front promenades, and schools, all in an environment relatively free of automobiles."[2]

Roosevelt Island represented a site that could be ideal for exploring the making of neighborhood, with its unique location and combination of urban planning, housing and social ideals. "A unique site coupled with experimental social and planning concepts raises a myriad of questions addressing issues in economics, politics, real estate, sociology, architecture, urban planning and site design. Roosevelt Island's answers... are fascinating yet often predictable, provocative yet possibly misleading. Exploring Roosevelt Island in search of social and/or physical planning dogma reveals even more questions, unexploited potential, unfulfilled dreams and a few brilliant gems."[3] Roosevelt Island contained the start of a planned

Figure 7: Aerial View, Existing North Town

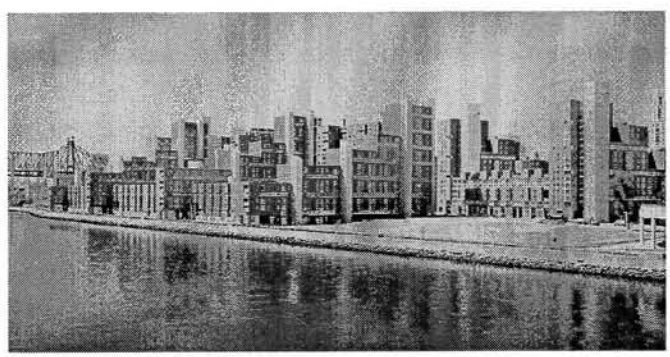

Figure 8: View from Queens to Roosevelt Island

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[2] Paul Goldberger, "An Island of Idealism in a Sea of Disdain," *The New York Times*, April 8, 1990, Sec.H, p.35.

[3] Steven R. Krog, "Evaulation: The Fabric of Roosevelt Island," *AIA Journal*, 68: 98, May 1979.

community, a neighborhood set apart from Manhattan, but still had a great deal of remaining potential. In addition, at the level of housing prototypes, the existing context also seemed an ideal one for exploring the role of low-rise/high-density housing as a vehicle for completing Roosevelt Island's development.

Thesis Statement

The thesis became an architectural exploration of what makes neighborhood and community at two scales: at the scale of the city (macrocosm), represented by the urban plan; and at the scale of the individual (microcosm), represented by the concept of house and housing. At these two contrasting scales, the main focus of the study was:

To explore how an urban design can shape community:

- How can a sense of place be created?
- How can a sense of individuality can be created?
- The role of the public and private realm in a community.
- The role of urban fabric and green space in the making of a neighborhood/community.

To explore the role housing plays in the making of urban fabric/neighborhood

- How can a housing prototype influence the architectural scale, quality and character of the urban fabric?
- How can a housing prototype be manipulated to create urban fabric, compose urban blocks and define street?
- The role of a housing prototype in creating civic and green space.
- The role of the a housing prototype in defining community.

These two main issues of urban planning and housing prototypes, and the set of questions they generated, became the framework for the proposed completion of Roosevelt Island's urban structure and housing types.

In the end, Roosevelt Island as a site became a very compelling factor in focusing the direction of the investigation, both at the urban planning level, and at the scale of the housing prototypes. At this point, I would like to outline the history of Roosevelt Island's development before discussing in detail the thesis's urban design proposal and the housing prototype investigation.

HISTORY OF ROOSEVELT ISLAND'S DEVELOPMENT

Early Development: 1828 - 1968

At one time, Roosevelt Island was a place given over to New York City's undesirables. In 1828, the City of New York purchased "Blackwell's Island" from the Blackwell family, with the intention of using the island as a home to a variety of medical, penal and welfare institutions.[4] Construction on the island began in 1839.

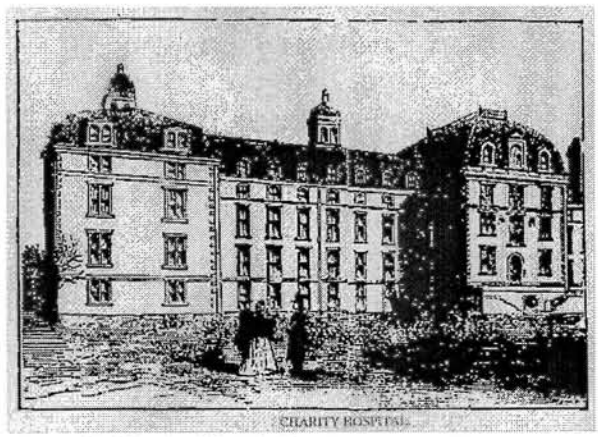

Figure 9: Charity Hospital

The first building was a penitentiary, and was followed by the construction of an asylum, an almshouse, and various hospitals. Some of the original buildings constructed from this era remain, many of them are New York City Landmarks and also on the National and State Historic Registers. At the southern end is the Strecker Laboratory building (Figure 11), built in 1892 and designed by Withers and

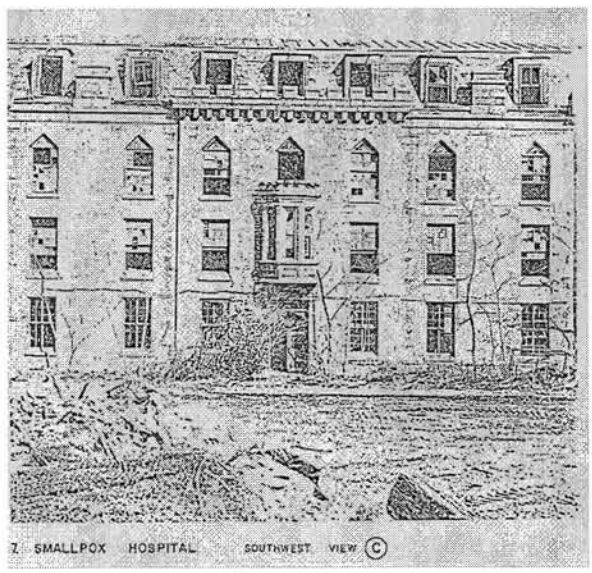

Figure 10: Smallpox Hospital

[4] Roosevelt Island Operation Corporation, *Pamphlet: "A Brief History of the Remains of Roosevelt Island Institutions* ".

Dickenson architects; the Smallpox Hospital (Figure 10), completed in 1856, and the Charity Hospital (Figure 9), built in 1860, were both designed by architect James Renwick, Jr. On the middle of the island is the Blackwell House, one of the oldest farmhouses in New York City; and the Chapel of the Good Shepard, built in 1889 and designed by Frederick Clark Withers. At the island's northern end is the Octagon Tower (Figures 13 and 14), completed in 1839, and designed by Alexander Jackson Davis as the administrative center for the New York City Lunatic Asylum; and a landmark lighthouse (Figure 12).[5]

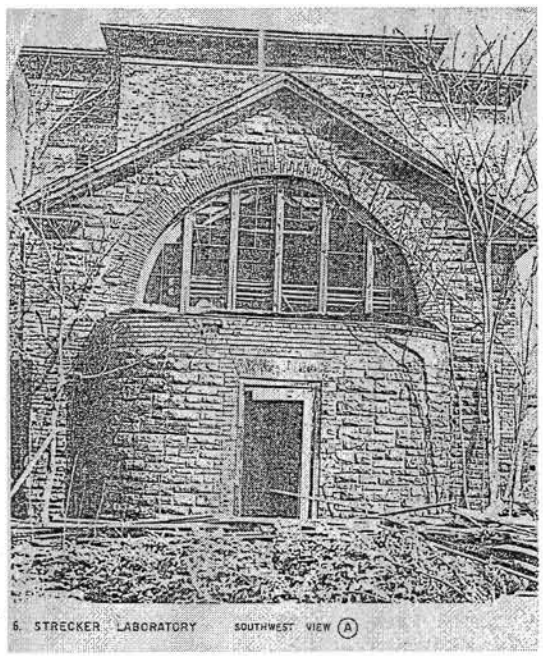

Figure11: Strecker Laboratory


Figure 12: Lighthouse

In 1921, Blackwell's Island was renamed "Welfare Island" to reflect its status as home to a variety of social institutions.[6] Over time, use of

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[5] Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation, April 1988, *Fact sheet, "Roosevelt Island, New York's "New Town-in-Town".*

[6] Roosevelt Island Operation Corporation, *Pamphlet: "A Brief History of the Remains of Roosevelt Island Institutions* ".

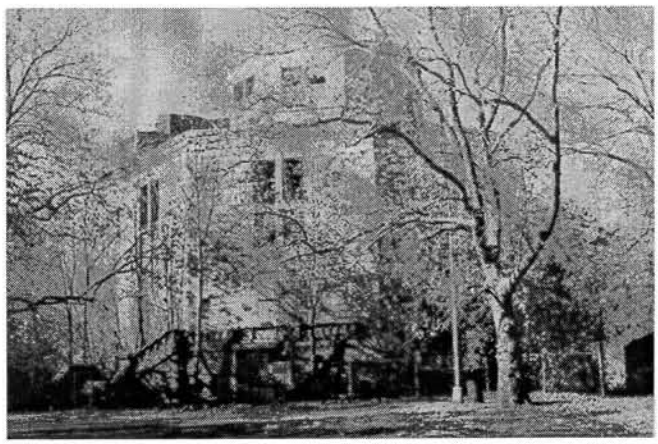

Figure 13: Octagon, Exterior View

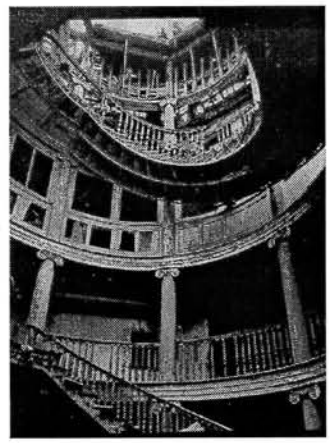

Figure14: Octagon, Interior View

the institutions on the island declined, and by the 1950's, many of the buildings were abandoned and lay in disrepair.

Modern Development: 1968 - 1989

There was no attempt to develop the island, despite its close proximity to Manhattan, until 1968. To study the island's potential for development, the Mayor of New York City appointed a committee. After a year-long study, the committee submitted a report recommending Welfare Island, to be renamed Roosevelt Island, be developed as a "well-designed community for people of every income group contained within a park-like setting; the retention of the two operating city hospitals, and the preservation of landmark structures."[7]

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[7]Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation, April 1988, *Fact sheet, "Roosevelt Island, New York's "New Town-in-Town".*

The New York State Urban Development Corporation (UDC) was created in 1968 in order to counter the financial and political barriers to providing public housing. The UDC was granted unusual political powers, meant to circumvent bureaucratic red tape, in order to allow the agency to take immediate action on the public housing problem. The UDC's primary concern was to improve the physical environment for low- and middle-income families and to aid in urban revitalization through the provision of innovative public housing. "In 1969, the City requested that the UDC carry out the committee's recommendation. Under a lease agreement with the City, the UDC created a subsidiary, the Roosevelt Island Development Corporation (RIDC), to undertake and finance the development program...As Roosevelt Island had been designated a New Community by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, it was eligible for Federal construction and rental subsidy grants."[8]

In March 1969, the UDC commissioned a team headed by Johnson/Burgee Architects to create a master plan for the development of Roosevelt Island. At the time, there was keen public interest in the proposal; the plan was ceremoniously unveiled in October 1969 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Numerous articles in newspapers and architectural journals followed, which presented and critiqued the proposal.

The Johnson/Burgee master plan proposed a development of two centers (see Figure 15), Southtown and Northtown. The plan encompassed the entire island, and addressed housing,

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[8] *Ibid.*

proposed location of open space, commercial space, schools and other components of the new community, and combining the historic buildings into the development.

"The plan is purposefully schematic and architecturally non-specific - the planners' main concern being to establish a framework to preserve the romantic insular quality of the site. The Johnson-Burgee plan centrally locates a 5000-unit residential community and public facilities in a two-park island town enclosing a town park. The island town is flanked on either side by city parks - a six-acre sports park to the south and a 25-acre ecological park to the north - isolating the hospital complexes at either end... A grand pedestrian promenade along the water's edge will skirt the perimeter of the island,

Figure 15: Roosevelt Island, with Johnson-burgee Plan Superimposed.

encompassing new park developments at both tips of the island."[9]

In the Johnson-Burgee plan, there is only one street, "Main Street" that is the principal organizer of the urban plan. It bends through the residential area, angled to present a sequence of views and spatial experiences. The future housing units were to encourage a socially and economically diverse community through a mix of 30% low-income (1/3 of these design specifically for the elderly); 25% moderate-income; 20% middle-income and 25% conventionally financed. [10]

Shortly after the Johnson-Burgee master plan was unveiled, design began on the housing components of the Northtown portion of the plan. In the fall of 1973, construction began on the 2,100 units comprising Phase I of Northtown. Completed in 1975, Phase I included the Eastwood and Westview complexes, designed by Sert, Jackson & Associates; the Rivercross and Island House complexes by Johansen & Bhavani; Motorgate garage and the vehicular bridge to Queens; and the AVAC service building where refuse would be pneumatically shuttled underground from the apartment houses.

Overall, the Phase 1 construction was designed in keeping with the concepts contained in the Johnson/Burgee master plan. The placement of the housing maintained the idea of creating

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[9] John S. Margolies, "New Town For New York City," *Architectural Forum*, 131: 41, October 1969.

[10] *Ibid.*, p 40.

a meandering main street, but the scale of the blocks differed significantly from the master plan. The housing complexes also promoted the agenda the UDC had defined for development of the island. "In keeping with the new community concept of a complete environment, both the low- and moderate-income housing and the market-rate housing incorporate within the general framework of their planning facilities needed for a complete living environment. At ground level, the public schools and their associated playgrounds are located. Along main street, shops open to the arcaded sidewalks. For the elderly, a community center has been provided; and facilities for infant and daycare centers and a health clinic are also incorporated."[11]

In 1975, after Northtown Phase I was occupied, the Roosevelt Island Housing Competition was held to invite proposals for developing the area just north of the Westview housing. The competition sought proposals to provide 1,000 housing units on a 9.2 acre parcel located across from the Motorgate parking garage. The proposed mix of units was to be similar to the mix of the Phase I housing: 45% low-to-moderate income, 20% middle income, 10% elderly and 25% high income. [12] While the competition yielded a wide variety of entries (see Figure 16), some more visionary and conceptual, the proposals from the competition were never implemented.

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[11] Roosevelt Island Operation Corporation, *Pamphlet: "New Community Development Roosevelt Island, New York"* .

[12] "Roosevelt Island Housing Competition, This Side of Habitat" *Progressive Architecture*, 56: 58, July 1975.

Due to the fiscal crisis of the mid-1970's and the UDC's financial problems, construction on Roosevelt Island halted in 1976. Of the 5,000 housing units originally planned for the island,

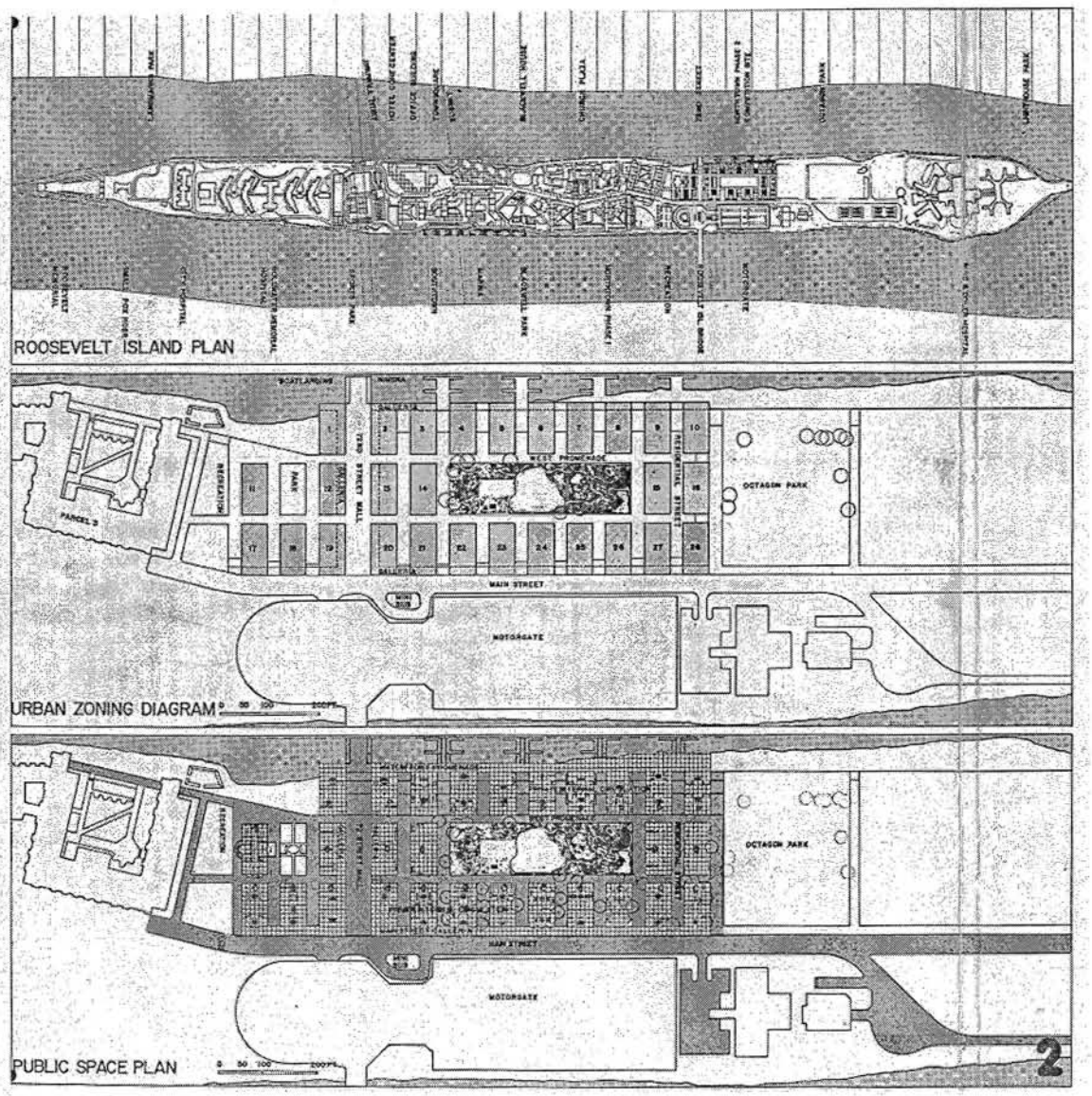

Figure 16: Sample Entry, 1975 Roosevelt Island Housing Competition

only 2,138 were built, although the infrastructure was almost completed. At the time, the island's population was about 5,200.

Construction activity on the island resumed in the early 1980's. "In May, 1981, the New York State Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) assumed administration of the island. In 1984, the New York State legislature created the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation (RIOC), a public benefit corporation...to assume the administration, operation and development of the island."[13] In 1986, the RIOC became official and resumed developing the island.

Under the RIOC, plans for Northtown Phase II and a new subway stop have been implemented to continue the island's growth. In addition, construction began in 1988 on the Manhattan Park complex, and was completed in 1989. Located on an 8.5 acre site directly across from the Motorgate parking complex (the same site of the 1975 competition), the five tower-like residential buildings are organized around an open green space that opens both to Main Street and Manhattan. The complex contains 1,108 housing units, unlike the existing housing complexes, only 20% are designated as low-income units, and are one of the last federally-funded through Section 8. The development will accommodate a projected population of 2,300 when fully rented. With the addition of Manhattan park, Roosevelt Island's total population could grow to 7,500.

The RIOC is defining the future development of Roosevelt Island into the 1990's and beyond (see Figure 17). At this point, the ROIC has targeted completing the island's development

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[13] Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation, April 1988, *Fact sheet, "Roosevelt Island, New York's "New Town-in-Town"*.

with about 3,500 additional housing units and public amenties, to bring the island's ultimate population to 16,000. Development of three areas is being considered: the southern tip of the island, containing some of the landmark hospital buildings; the 20-acre Southtown

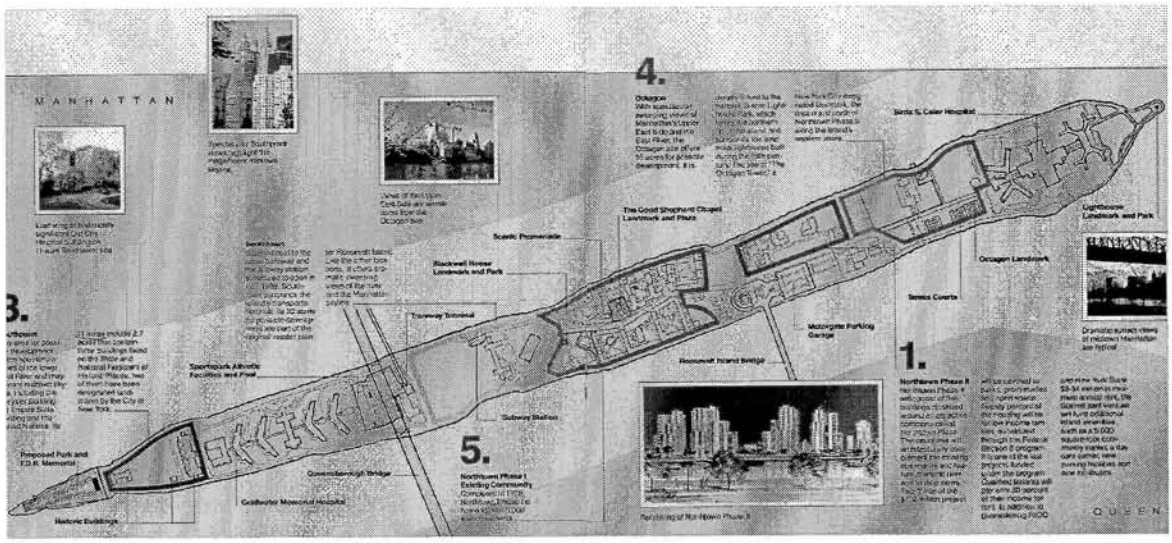


Figure 17: Roosevelt Island, 1980's plan, Roosevelt Island Operation Corporation.

parcel, which had originally been part of the 1969 Johnson-Burgee master plan; and the 16-acre area surrounding the historic Octagon structure on the northern portion of Roosevelt Island.

At this point, it is unclear what direction Roosevelt Island's completion may take, depending on the political and economical forces that could shape its development in the years to come. The urban planning ideas of the 1969 master plan are outdated; a new plan should be developed to ensure that future development helps Roosevelt Island achieve its potential as an alternate community for Manhattan. Whether the social ideals that shaped the original

master plan will inform plans for future growth is uncertain. Roosevelt Island, as it presently exists is a compelling site that is an intriguing social, architectural, visual and intellectual context to explore.

THESIS PROJECT

Overview

The thesis exploration of Roosevelt Island's completion was shaped by continually approaching the design proposal at two distinct scales: the scale of the urban design (macrocosm) and the scale of the individual and house (microcosm). In the course of investigating the architectural proposal for the community and neighborhood, it was important that the design exploration at these two scales inform one another. The concept for the urban structure needed to be influenced by the exploration of the housing types, and the development of the housing types needed to reinforce concepts at the urban planning level.

In my view, the proposal for completing Roosevelt Island's community could not adequately address issues of neighborhood and community by considering the urban fabric in abstract or formal terms only. The scale, character and form of the urban structure needed to be influenced by what it would be composed of and how it would foster a sense of community. What programmatic elements would define the public and private realm of the plan? How would green space, civic, retail and other community amenities be incorporated? What housing prototypes would compose the urban fabric and how would the housing component influence the urban proposal's architectural scale, quality and character?

Similarly, the housing prototype investigation needed to be shaped by the structure, forms and ideas of the urban plan. How could an individual housing prototype be manipulated to

compose the larger pieces of the urban fabric? What role would a prototype have in determining the scale, character and form of the urban fabric: the block, the street, and green space? How would the housing prototypes be designed for the individual in the community?

Roosevelt Island as a site and context also strongly influenced the final form of the thesis proposal. As the investigation progressed, both the urban plan and housing prototype design were shaped by analysis of the existing urban and housing conditions. The final proposal also evolved to become an architectural commentary on Roosevelt Island as a community.

Design Process

The overall framework for Roosevelt Island's proposed completion was to investigate the interplay and relationship of the built environment and green space in creating community. This was seen as the primary issue that would inform the design of both the urban plan and the housing prototypes. Layered onto this main issue was defining the specific urban structure,

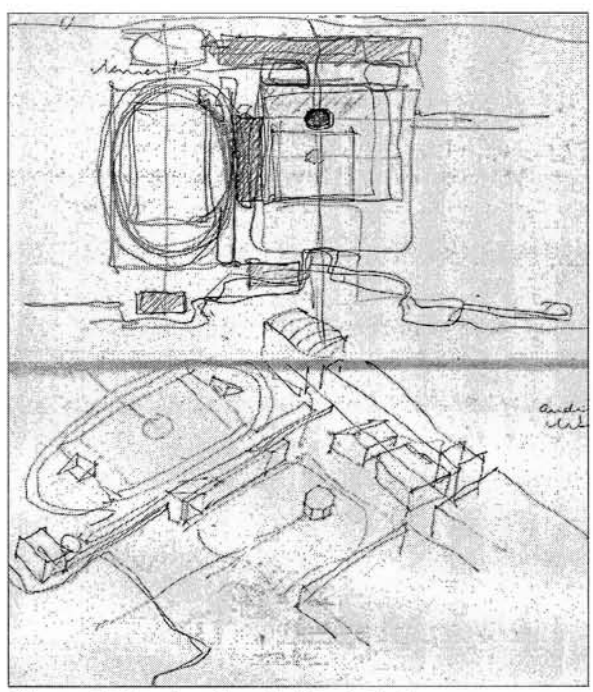


Figure 18: Design Sketch, North End

the relationship of building and green space and the types of housing that would foster a sense of community in the specific context of Roosevelt Island.

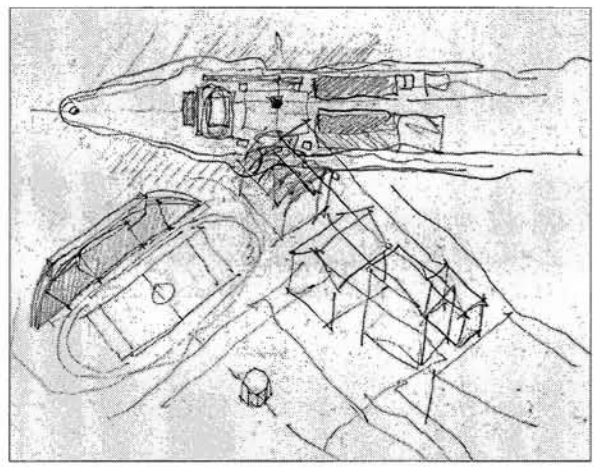


Figure 19: Design Sketch, North End

Considering what specific public, cultural and civic program pieces would be needed to complete the community became an important component in the design process. The initial studies for an overall urban plan examined what urban programmatic elements should be provided if the island was expanded from its current population of roughly 7,000 to accommodate a population of approximately 16,000. While the existing community provided some amenities to the island's residents, many services were still available only on Manhattan. Few cultural amenities, such as a main library, movie theaters, restaurants, cafes, art galleries, etc., existed on-island, most likely because the current

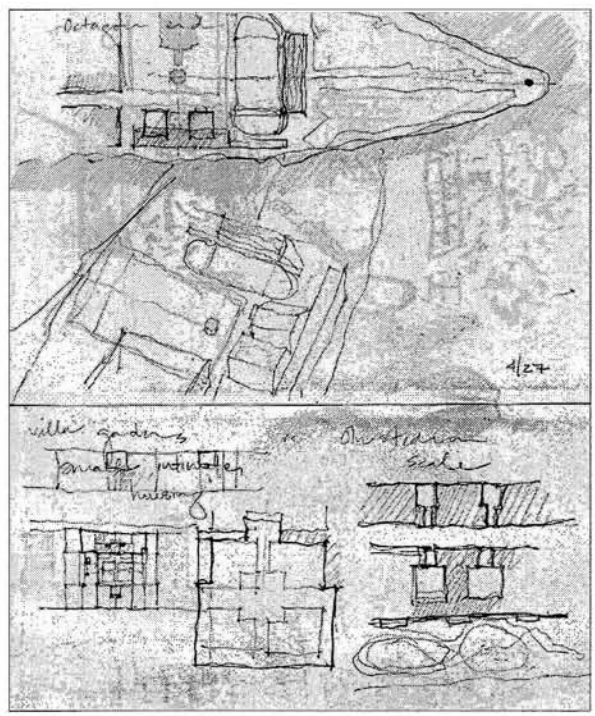


Figure 20: Design Sketch, North End and Urban Blocks

population could not support them. In forming a proposal for the urban plan, an attempt was made to consider the role that new public and civic program pieces would have in the plan, and how their design would influence the scale and character of the new neighborhoods.

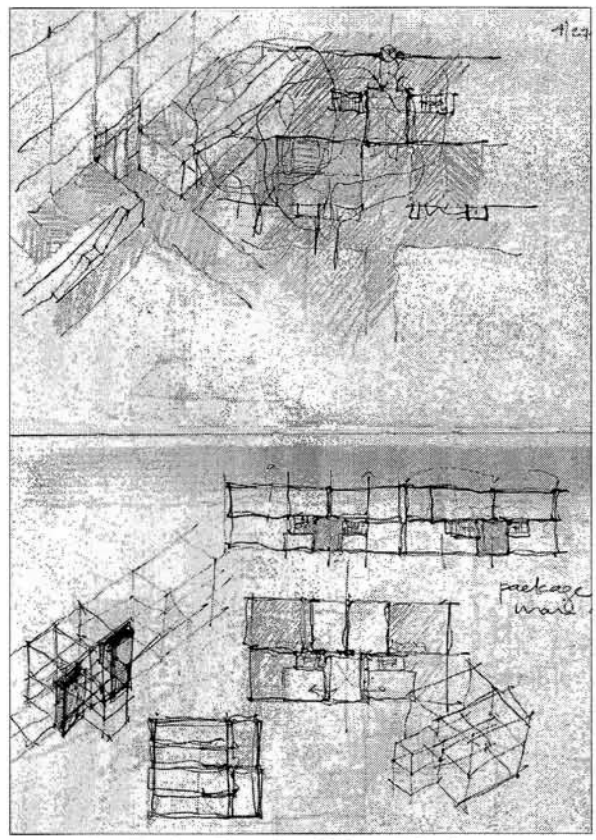


Figure 21: Design Sketches, Urban Blocks

The design proposition also accepted the built portion of Main Street as an existing condition to be incorporated into the larger urban plan for Roosevelt Island's completion. The thesis studied how the new urban intervention could build on this existing portion of the community's composition, and investigated how the new urban fabric could transform the existing fabric's definition and character. An attitude was taken to also preserve the island's perimeter as part of the community's public realm, as a promenade that would become a large public park.

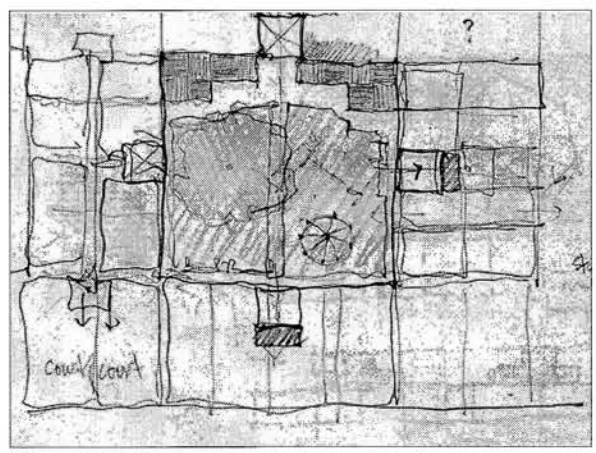


Figure 22: Design Sketch, Urban Block

Other issues were also examined at the urban scale: existing vehicular and pedestrian circulation, the value of introducing cross-island vehicular and pedestrian streets; and the incorporation of urban spaces and public parks into the overall urban plan.

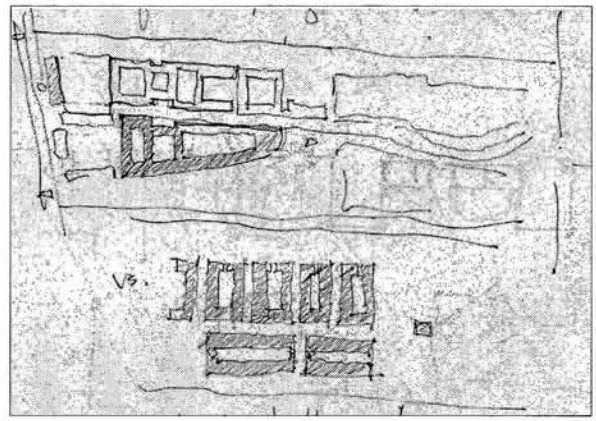


Figure 23: Design Sketches, South End

At this stage of the investigation, small-scale figure/ground plan collages of the entire island also became a tool for investigating the urban design issues of the thesis. To help understand the scale of the island and to spark ideas about alternative planning concepts, various pieces of city plans, college campuses and urban park plans were copied at the same scale as the island plan, then collaged into conceptual plans that suggested completed urban designs for the entire island. In the process

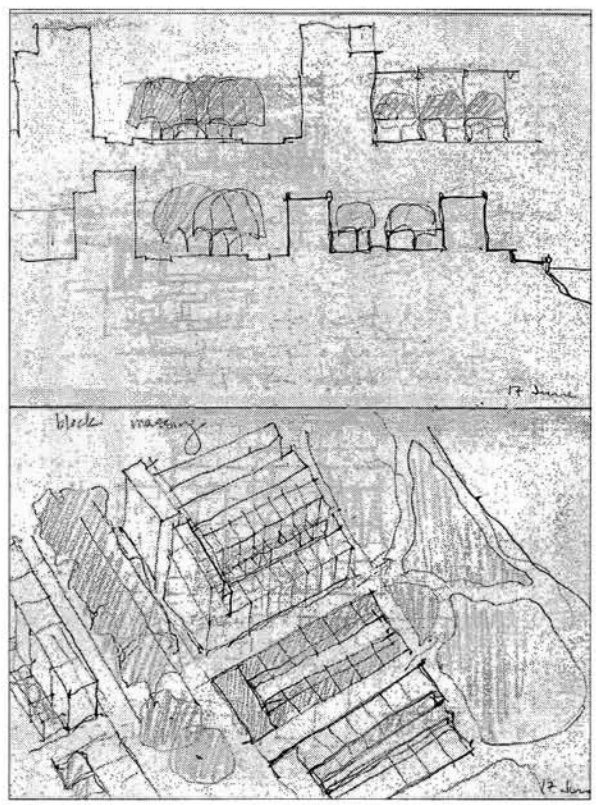


Figure 24: Design Sketches, Urban Blocks

of making the collages, there was a conscious choice to select set pieces that combined buildings and green space. The collages also became tools to generate ideas for the form and scale of the urban fabric and green spaces through the process of selecting the set pieces, through the combinations arrived at in the collage process, and through the juxtaposition of the pieces against the existing context.

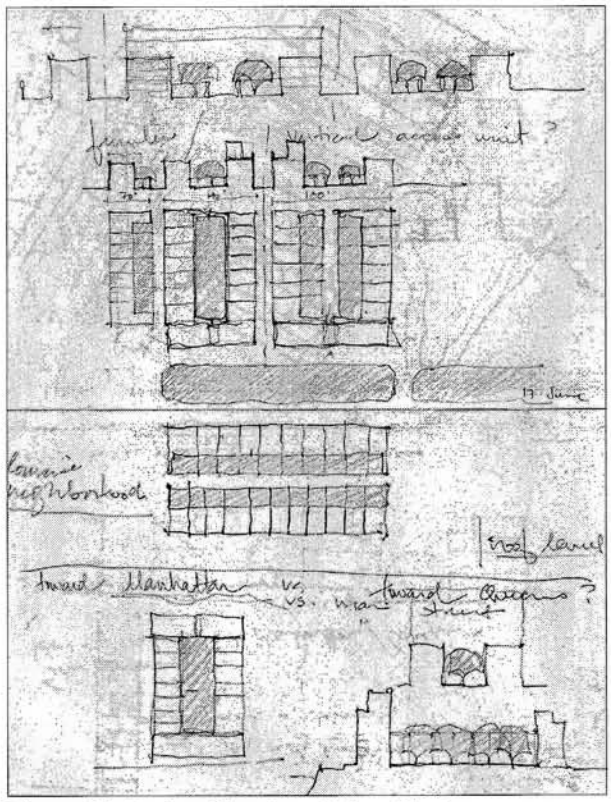


Figure 25: Design Sketches, Urban Blocks.

The thesis was also shaped by exploring the architectural definition of community at the scale of the individual, represented by the concept of house. The attitude of the housing investigation was that it should establish an ideal standard for the scale and quality of

housing at several levels. The prototypes should define a sense of place, a sense of individuality, provide access to light and air, promote and accommodate a variety of family types, sizes and living styles, and define the individual's relationship to the public and private realm of the community. During the exploration, the housing prototypes' design was equally influenced by the earlier research of the UDC's low-rise, high-density housing projects, the existing context of Roosevelt Island, and selected modern housing precedents.

The island's context was compelling, both from an architectural and social viewpoint. The existing housing had promoted a socially, ethnically and economically integrated community; the design attitude for the proposed housing would continue to promote the same ideals. However, although the existing housing was well-designed, it currently offered only one type of block comprised of the higher-rise, higher-density, point-access housing. The thesis proposed that a different type of urban fabric and neighborhood should be provided as a counterpoint. It would be valuable to develop on Roosevelt Island a neighborhood consisting of smaller-scale, walk-up housing. The low-rise, high-density housing prototypes studied during the research phase were considered the primary means for exploring the design of this new type neighborhood for Roosevelt Island. Over the course of the thesis investigation, the housing prototype study actually expanded to become an in-depth study of two types: one based on a point-access, skip-stop corridor system, and the other based on a "walk-up" town-house type configuration. These two types were eventually assembled in various configurations to compose the blocks of the urban design proposal.

The following sections describe the thesis's approach for Roosevelt Island's completion. Even though the design process for the urban plan and the housing was approached as an integrated whole, for organizational purposes, the discussion that follows will divide between the urban design investigation and the development of the housing prototypes. First, the urban design proposition will be considered, with an analysis of the issues and ideas which shaped it. Then, the housing prototypes will be examined, including the influence the existing Roosevelt Island housing types and modern housing precedents had in shaping the proposal. Finally, a section will offer critical analysis of the thesis project's final form.

Part One: The Urban Design Proposal

A Critical Assessment of Roosevelt Island's Urban Context

The urban design study began with a critical assessment of the existing context of Roosevelt Island (Figure 26). In order to propose how this community should be completed, it was vital to understand the community's existing urban composition, both architecturally and programmatically. From an urban planning viewpoint, the most identifiable portion of the island is the community surrounding Main Street that was constructed in the 1970's through the UDC's work, and has been subsequently expanded through the addition of the Manhattan Park housing development. This existing context of street and block structure, as well as the housing types, represented an established attitude toward making a community that could be accepted, rejected or modified in a proposal for Roosevelt Island's future growth.

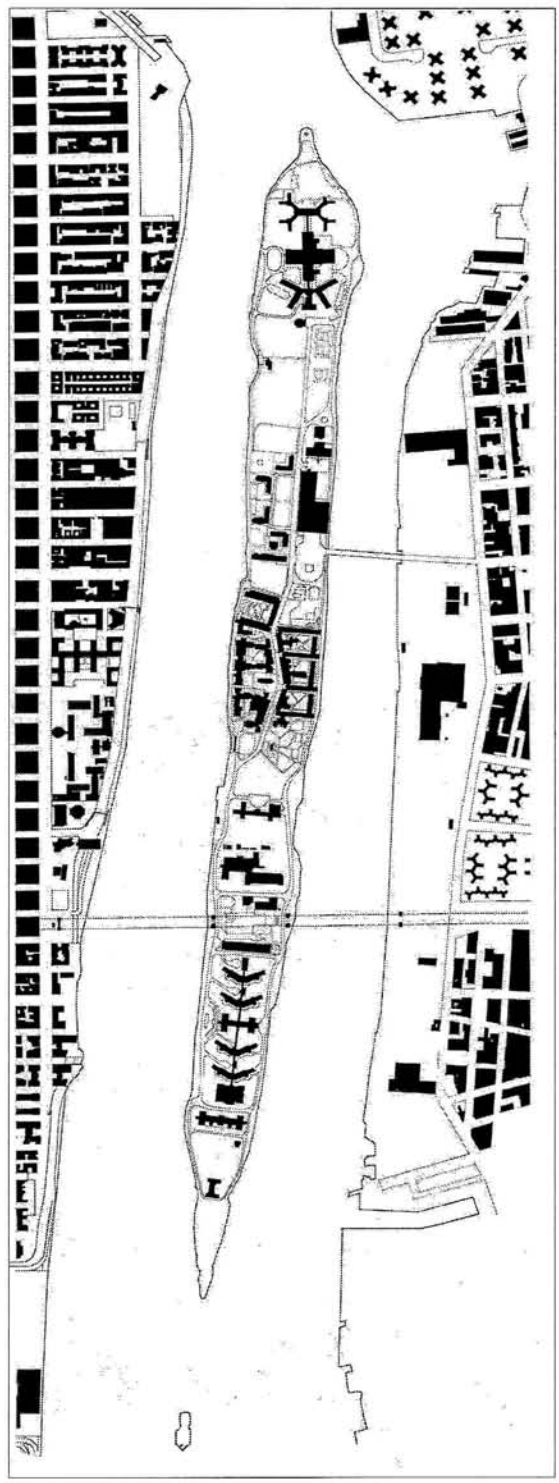


Figure 26: Roosevelt Island, Existing Figure/Ground Plan

This existing portion of Main Street (Figure 27) is most readily characterized by the volumetric development and materials of the existing 1970's housing complexes, as the newer Manhattan Park complex sits apart from this area and minimally engages Main Street. The facades and urban block structure of the 1970's housing delineate a strong vertical scale to the street edge (Figure 28). The street level is further defined at the base of the housing blocks by a relatively continuous pedestrian arcade containing retail and commercial space (Figure 29). The street facades have a homogeneous quality, due to the uniform scale, materials and aesthetic of the housing design (Figure 30). The arcade's character is also somewhat undifferentiated. While the arcade was probably conceived as inviting element at the scale of the individual, it actually ends up separating both the individual and the business and commercial

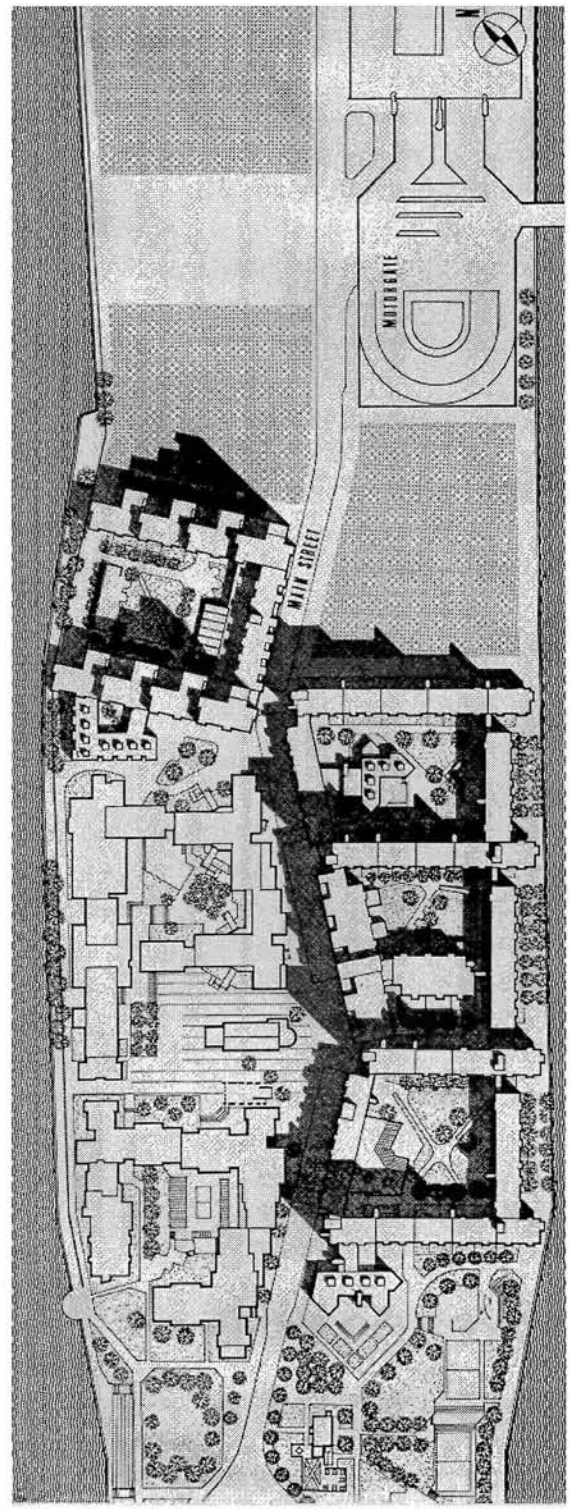


Figure 27: Plan, Existing Main Street

components of the community from the activity of Main Street. As a result, this part of Main street feels spatially closed and self-referential.

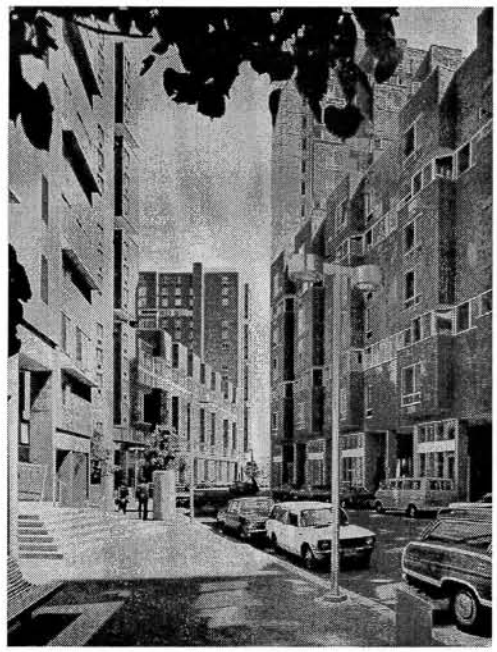


Figure 28: Photo, Existing Main Street

The uniformity of main street is interrupted by one urban space, a paved plaza at the Chapel of the Good Shepard. The community's elementary schools (the high school is located off-island, in Manhattan) are not directly on the street, but rather located to the interior of the housing blocks. Other civic amenities and buildings (library, market, town hall, civic center) that one might expect to assert a civic presence on Main Street are absent, a missed opportunity to celebrate the public realm that defines a community. Here exists an opportunity to interject into the community a stronger civic presence and more defined public realm into Main Street's structure.

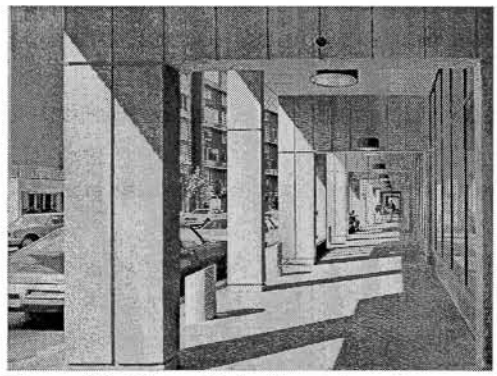


Figure 29: Photo, Main Street Arcade

Figure 30: Photo, Eastwood Housing, Main Street Facade

In plan, Main Street also divides the island at its center, implying an equality to either side, when in fact the Manhattan and Queens sides are very different. The Queens side is industrial in nature, with the existing power plant and the Motorgate bridge providing a factory and machine aesthetic to the views. The views to Manhattan are powerful and beautiful, with the repetitive beauty of the Queensborough bridge's structure and immense scale and Manhattan's poetic jumble of towers creating a bustling skyline. Even with this visually evocative context, there are very few cross-island views afforded from Main Street.

An equally compelling feature of Roosevelt Island is its river-edge perimeter and boat-like form, with the form of the northern and southern tips of the island suggesting the metaphors of prow and stern. In contrast to the inward focus of Main Street, the perimeter interacts with the larger metropolitan context, with exciting views of Manhattan, the Queensborough Bridge, Ward and Randall's Islands, and Queens' industrial river-front structures.

A river-front promenade has been partially developed in conjunction with the existing housing, but is discontinuous. There is the opportunity to complete a promenade around Roosevelt Island's entire perimeter. Currently, the southern tip of the island is undeveloped and its land and spectacular view of the United Nations complex and Manhattan inaccessible to the public. The northern tip contains the start of a park to highlight a landmark lighthouse structure, but is separated from the existing community by undeveloped land and Coler Hospital. There is great potential to develop Roosevelt Island's river edge as a community

amenity - a public green space that could encircle the island, and celebrate both the Manhattan and Queens views.

The balance of the island contains a varied assortment of building types and conditions to be integrated in the proposal. The existing tram station next to Queensborough Bridge, while functional, is not connected by an urban structure to the existing community and Main Street. Two hospitals, Goldwater Memorial at the southern end and Coler Hospital at the northern end, are vast object buildings, sprawling out oblivious to larger issues of site and urban context. The island also contains the remains of abandoned buildings with historical significance: the Smallpox and Charity Hospitals, and Strecker Laboratory, all constructed in the 1800's remain at southern end. Blackwell House is situated adjacent to the existing Main Street community. On the northern end, there is the Octagon Tower, a remnant of the Lunatic Asylum, and the Lighthouse. These architectural artifacts that symbolize the Island's history could become civic pieces in a new urban fabric: historical, cultural or art museums for example, highlighted and celebrated in the design proposal for Roosevelt Island's completion.

Urban Design Proposal

The new urban plan for Roosevelt Island is conceived as an integrated whole which establishes a concept for the eventual development of the entire island (Figure 31). The urban structure is composed of a variety of block types and green spaces, defining a pattern for growth and incorporating many of the island's existing structures into the design. The new fabric contains a variety of streets, public spaces, civic buildings and other elements that constitute the public realm of the community. The proposed urban structure also addresses the private realm through the creation of more intimate minor streets, smaller scale parks and urban spaces, and private green spaces.

The original Main Street was seen as the primary urban element that spatially and architecturally had established Roosevelt Island's sense of community. In my view, continuing Main Street as the defining urban

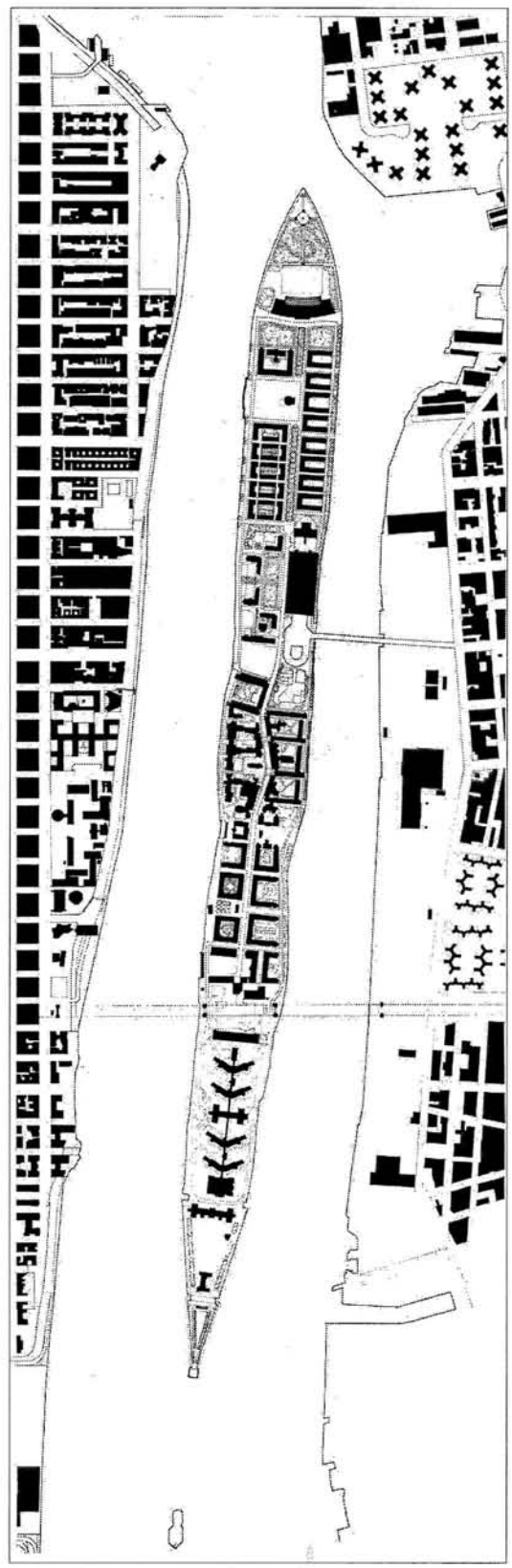


Figure 31: Proposed Figure/Ground Plan

element for the entire island was a compelling way to reinforce the community's identity. In new urban fabric of the thesis proposal, Main Street is the coordinating element, and has been expanded to stretch almost the entire length of the island. Main Street becomes an organizer, the "thread" onto which the new urban structure is strung. Two new neighborhoods of contrasting scale and character, and composed of different housing types, bracket the existing development.

The first neighborhood, "South Town," is composed of larger-scale urban blocks spanning from the north side of the Queensborough Bridge to the southern edge of the existing development. The proposed plan for the South Town neighborhood (Figure 32) was shaped by several concepts. The first was to configure the new urban fabric to continue Main Street as the primary connector from the existing community to the tram stop adjacent to the Queensborough

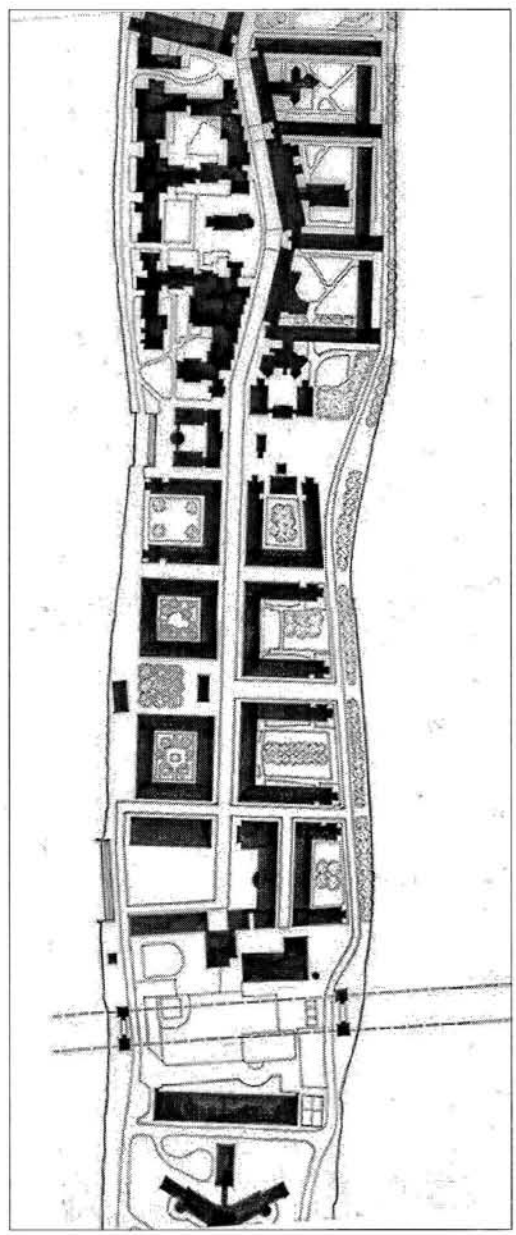


Figure 32: Proposed Figure/Ground Plan, South Town

bridge. Another idea was to echo Manhattan's urban structure of major north/south streets punctuated by secondary east/west streets. Also, there was the thought to create a primary public space and an urban connection at the existing tram stop that would become a central point for transportation and commercial activity. Additionally, this neighborhood's form was influenced by planning spaces in the urban structure to incorporate a library, market building, elementary school, and the new subway stop already under construction.

South Town's urban fabric is composed to define Main Street as the primary street, but also introduces secondary pedestrian and vehicular cross-island streets that create views to Manhattan and Queens. Main Street is defined through a set of distinct orthogonal urban blocks that relate to the scale of the existing housing fabric. This neighborhood consists of both square courtyard and U-shaped blocks containing commercial space at street level, and housing above. The exterior edges of the blocks recognize the public nature of the street; their structure emulates the typical Manhattan city street, with a pedestrian sidewalk mediating between the street and building edge. The interior of the blocks provides private green spaces at the scale of the block which serves as a counter-point to the community's public realm.

At the south end of the neighborhood, next to the Queensborough bridge, a new urban square is created as the main public space . This new town square would be a major hub of activity, a space that both residents and visitors would circulate through, to, or from the tram stop, and would be enlivened by shops, cafes and restaurants as well as being a place to enjoy the view.

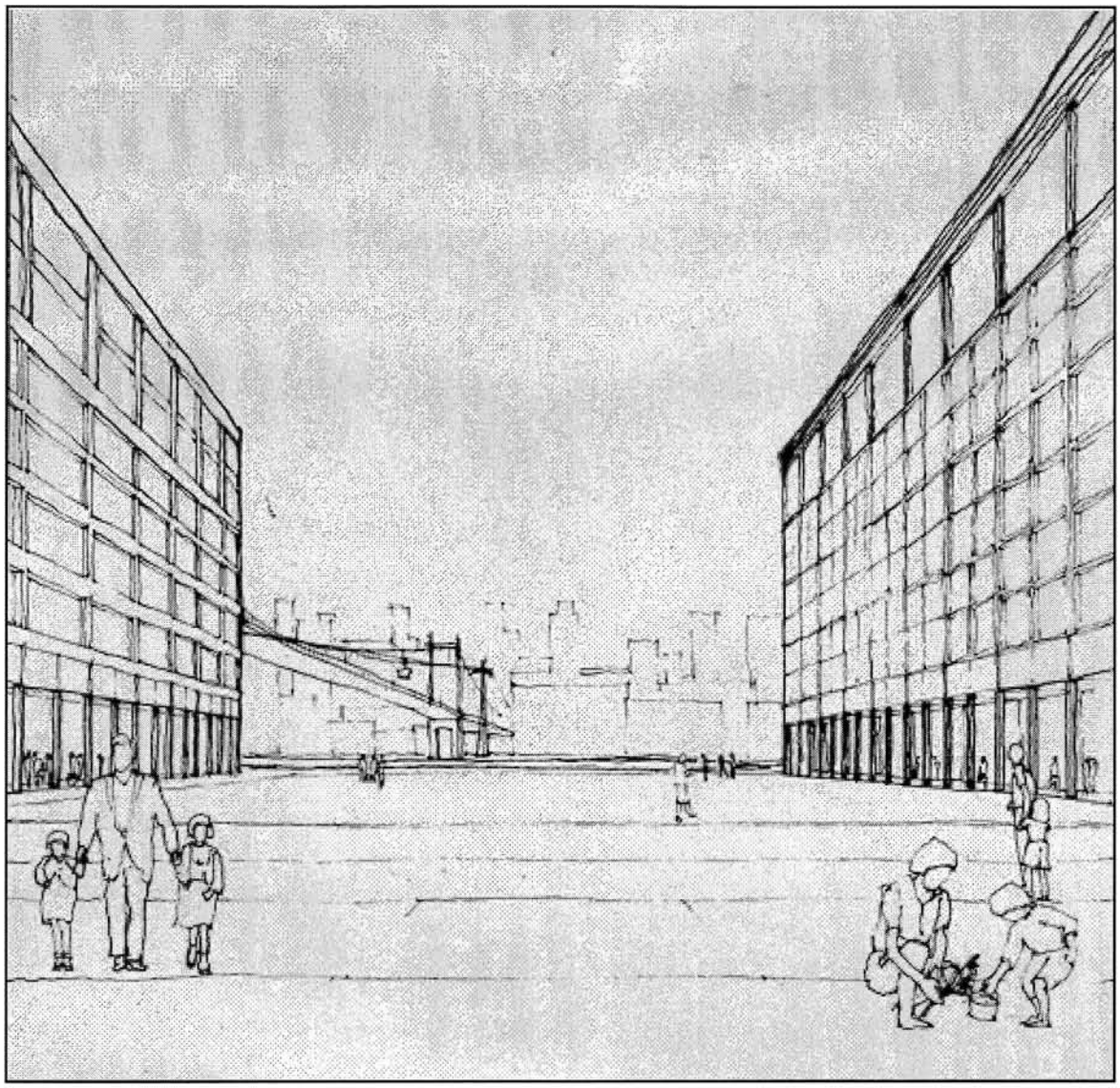


Figure 33: Perspective, View of Town Square Looking Toward Manhattan.

To support the public activity, the urban fabric that defines the space is entirely programmed with commercial and retail space. The square is designed to incorporate the tram station and is framed on three sides by arcaded buildings. On the north and south sides, the square is flanked by buildings containing street-level retail space with office space above. On the east side is a covered market building that could be used for farmers' markets and community events and exhibitions. The space opens to the west to the Manhattan side of the river,

framing the spectacular views of the Queensborough Bridge and the East Side (Figure 33). This space engages the river edge with a wide stepped terrace that would be a place for residents to meet and enjoy the views.

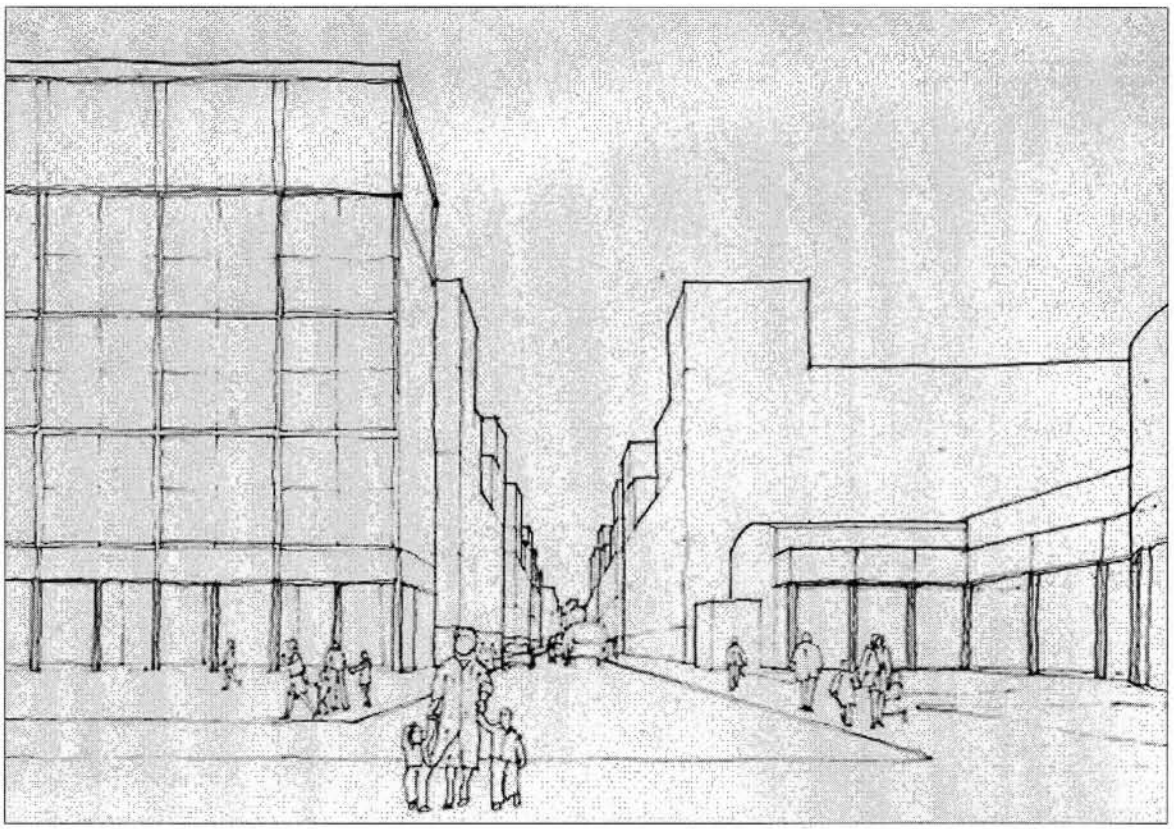


Figure 34: Perspective, Looking North to Main Street from the Town Square.

Proceeding north on Main Street (Figure 34), a series of public spaces and civic buildings punctuate the street structure. At the subway stop, a small, hard-paved urban space containing a grid of trees and framed by street-level commercial space is created (Figure 35). Several spaces and buildings mediate between the northern-most point of the new neighborhood and its interface with the existing urban fabric. A public park is created,

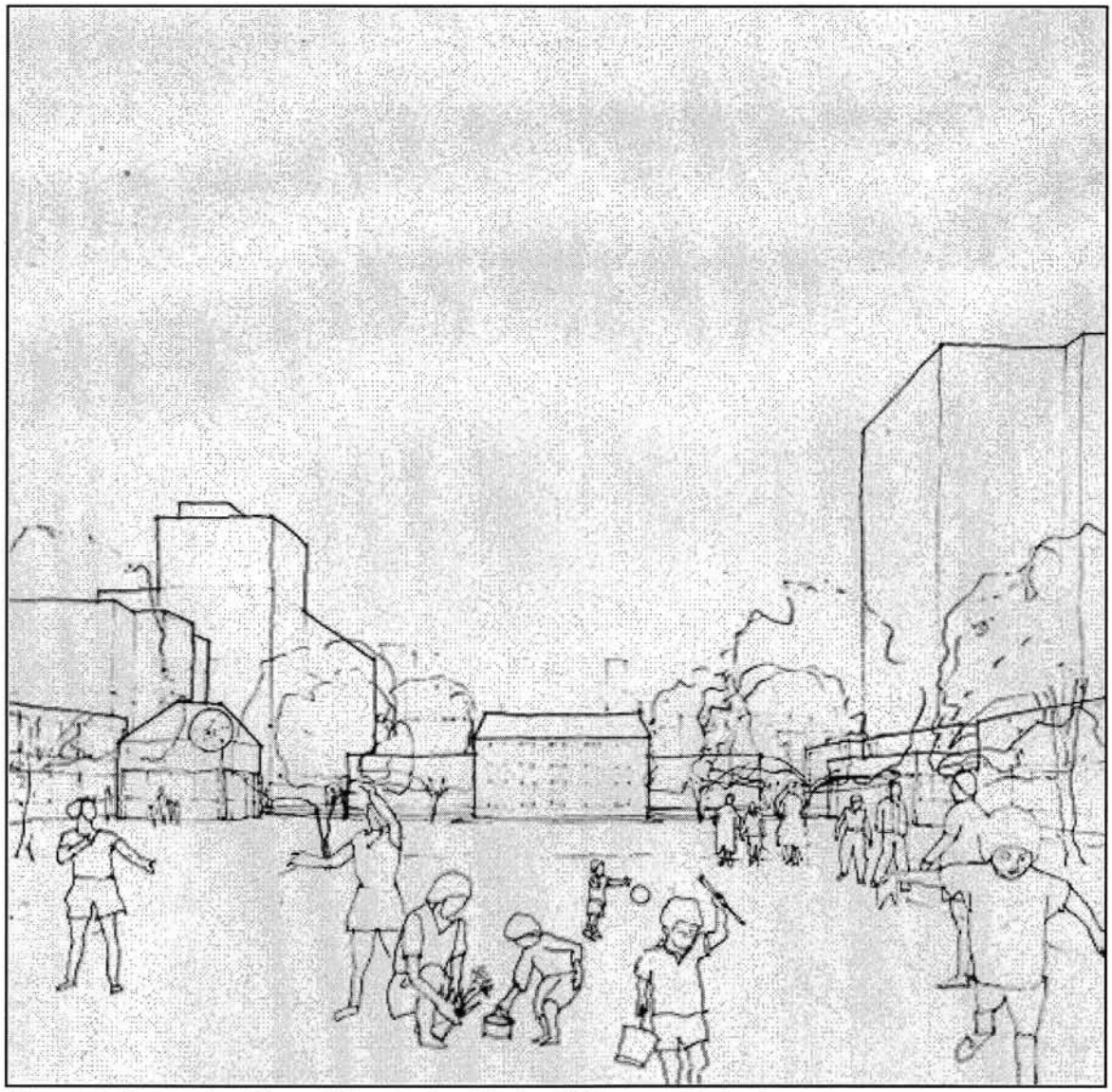


Figure 36: Perspective, View of New Park at Blackwell House and Schools.

North of the Blackwell House, the entire existing neighborhood on the middle of the island remains, including the Manhattan Park housing, Motorgate garage and AVAC service building. Immediately north of this area and spanning to the northern-most tip of the island a new residential neighborhood, "North Town" is proposed, composed of smaller-scale urban fabric.

The plan for the North Town community (Figure 37) was influenced by several ideas. Primarily, this neighborhood was conceived as a counterpoint to the higher-density development of the island's southern end. The urban fabric would explore designing a block structure to create a neighborhood with a more intimate scale, and planned to integrate a variety of public and private green spaces. There was also the intent to continue Main Street as the primary defining urban element of the neighborhood, but to explore changing its structure and character though its relationship to park and green space.

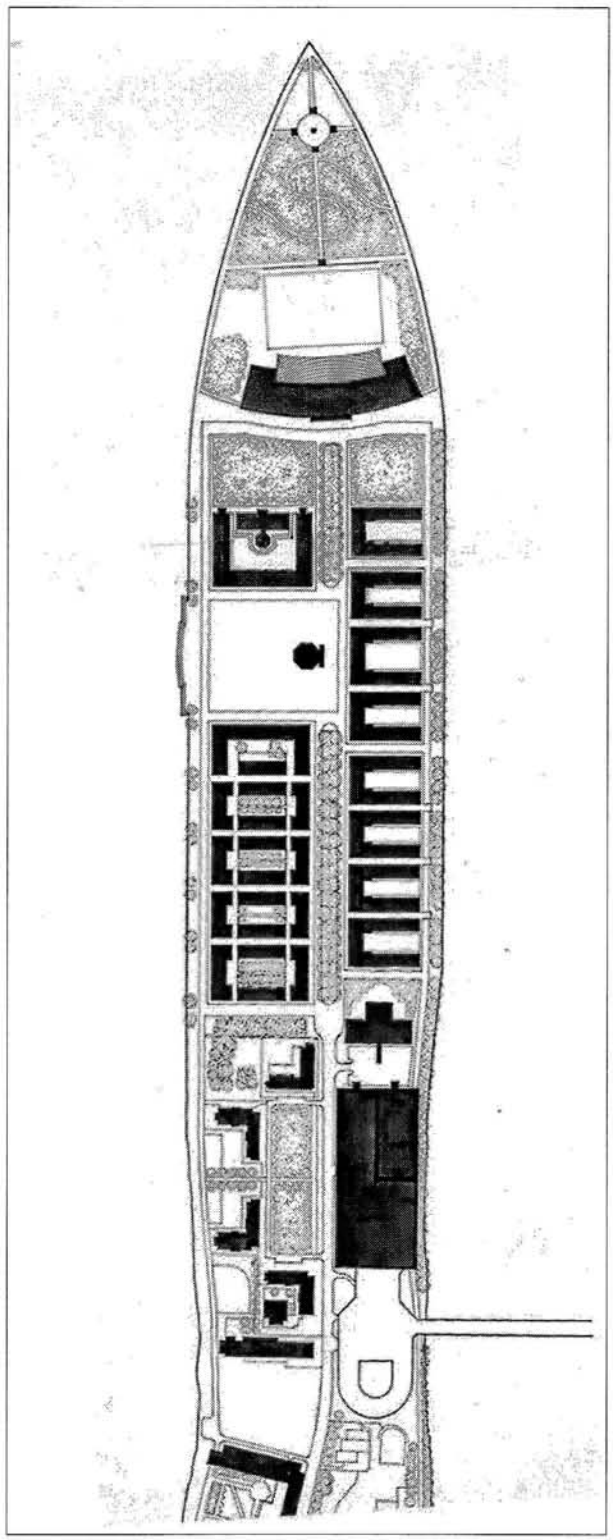


Figure 37: Proposed Plan, North Town.

In contrast to South Town's structure and Roosevelt Island's existing context, North Town's urban fabric reinterprets the structure of Manhattan's older residential fabric. These older Manhattan

neighborhoods are typified by a rectangular block structure laid out in a grid. The short sides of the blocks align with the primary streets which run north/south. The long sides of the blocks define the east/west secondary streets, and are typically composed of lower scale walk-up "brownstone" row houses. The interiors of the blocks contain open space for light and air to enter, but are very irregularly defined and not intended to be spaces shared by block residents.

North Town's fabric echos many qualities of these Manhattan neighborhood precedents, but also departs from them. Like the "brownstone" residential fabric of Manhattan, North Town's blocks are rectangles oriented with the short sides defining Main Street, and the long sides demarcating the East/West cross-streets. The blocks on either side of Main street are off-set from one another, with the cross-island streets presenting alternating views to Manhattan or Queens. The neighborhood's secondary streets are designed to promote pedestrian activity; the majority planned as pedestrian-only, with a few designed to accommodate vehicular traffic. Small streets are also introduced along the river edge for minor vehicular traffic.

The residential fabric of North Town is primarily composed of two block types. On the west side of Main Street, the short sides of the blocks are composed of bars of point-access housing, defining a strong edge to Main Street and to Manhattan. The sides of the blocks facing the secondary streets are structured of bars of walk-up housing separated from the

ends of the block by small alleys. The interiors of the blocks contain planned community green space to be shared by the residents.

On the east side of Main Street, the blocks are U-shaped, with the open end orienting to Queens. Like the west side of Main Street, the edge of these blocks consists of a bar of point-access housing, while the arms of the "U" on the cross-streets contain walk-up housing. The entire block is raised on a plinth that contains resident parking below. Above the plinth on the interior of the block is the shared green space.

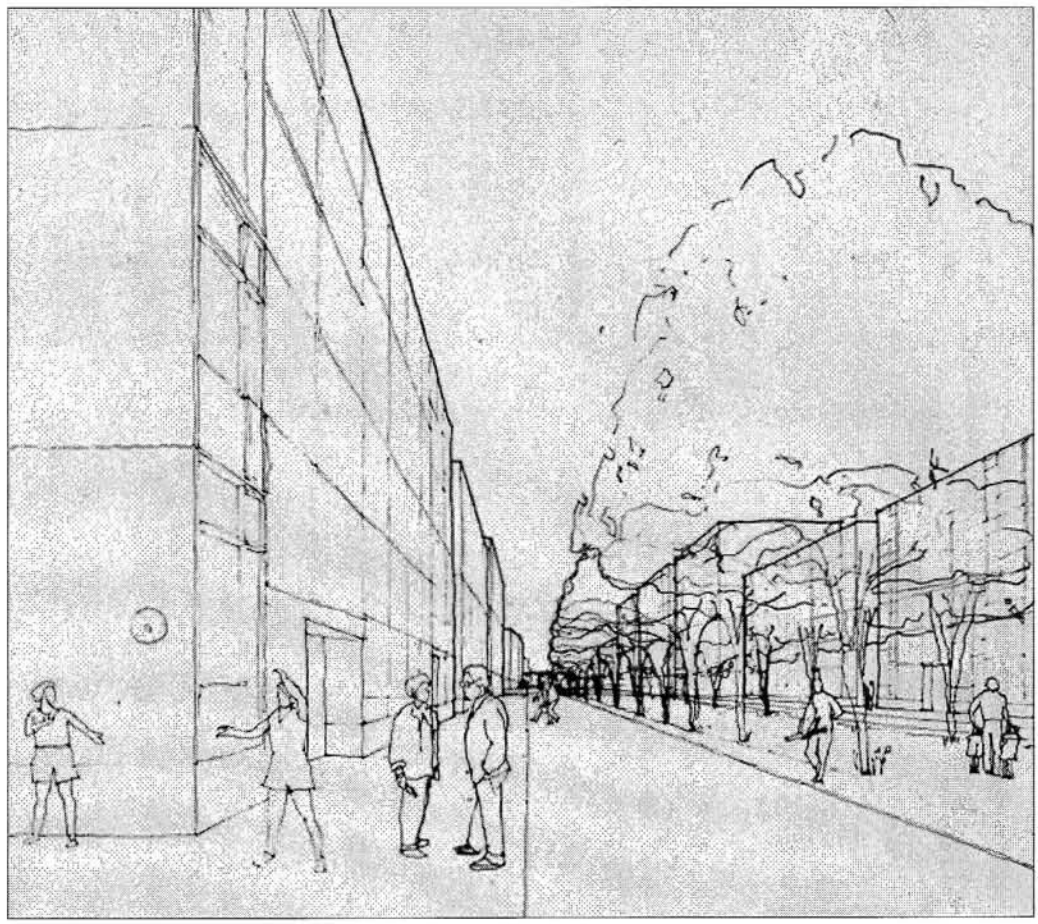


Figure 38: Perspective, View of Main Street, North Town.

North Town's urban structure also creates a Main Street whose scale and character differs from its development to the south. Main Street is planned as a park-like boulevard that is divided by a tree-lined green space, a counter-point to the hard-paved, highly defined street wall of the southern end of the street (Figures 38 and 39). The overall proportion of the street also changes as the street widens and the vertical scale of the blocks decreases. Here, Main Street has a quieter character that is reinforced by the block's residential composition.

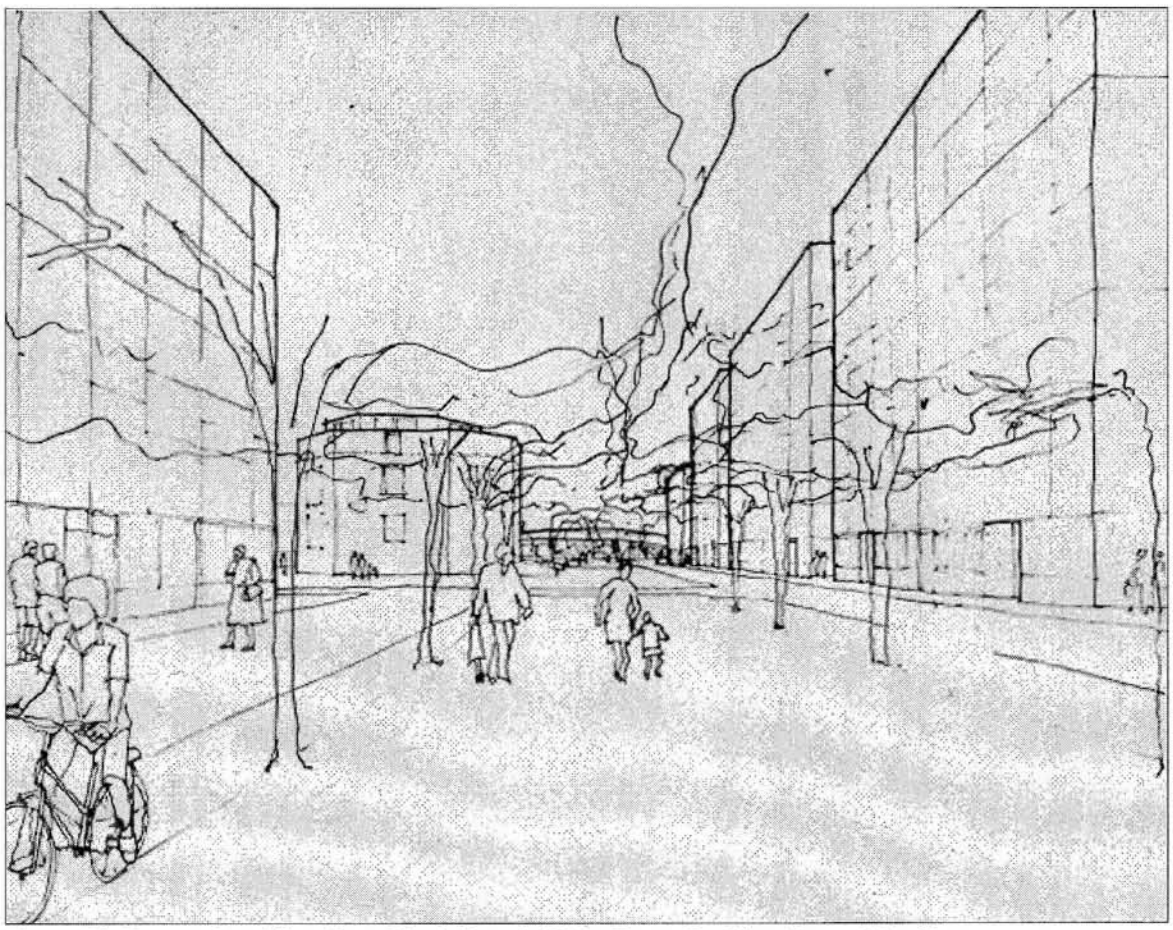


Figure 39: Perspective, View from North Town's Main Street, Looking Toward the Octogon.

Along Main Street, the scale of the neighborhood is defined by six-story high, point-access housing, while the cross-streets are lined with four-story high, walk-up housing (Figures 40 and 41). Main Street's character continues to evolve as it travels north, skimming the edge of a park at the Octagon, continuing as a boulevard and terminating at the curved, arcaded facade of the new Roosevelt Island High School/Athletic Complex located on the northern-most portion of the island.

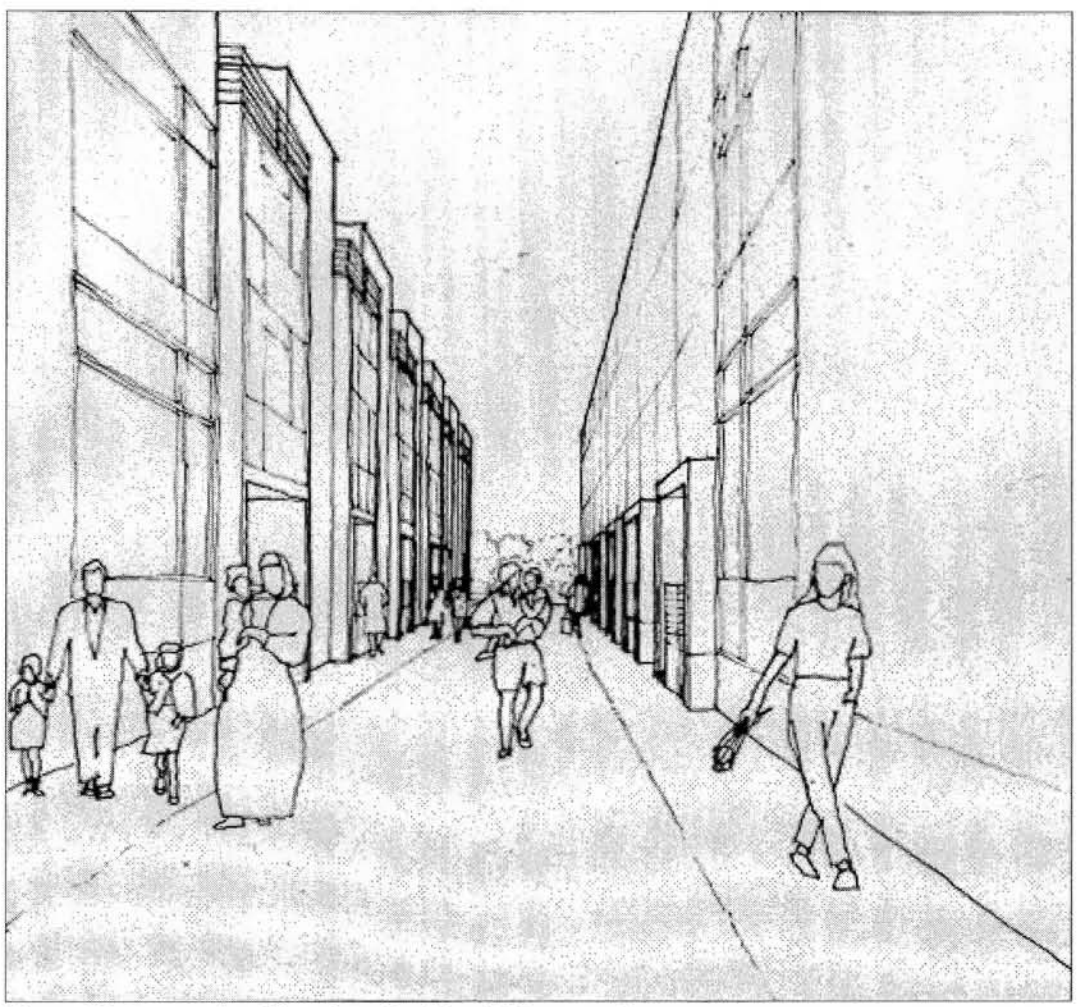


Figure 40: Perspective, View from Residential Street to Queens.

Figure 41: Perspective, View from Residential Street to Main Street.

This main public space in this neighborhood centers around the Octagon Tower remains (Figure 42). This space was conceived as a broad, town green that would highlight the restored Octagon, and become the commercial center for the neighborhood. This large park would support a mix of commercial and residential space. Shops, cafes and restaurants would be located at street-level, with housing above. The Octagon Park is defined on three sides by the urban blocks, focusing on views west to Manhattan's upper East Side. The river-edge would be sculpted as a large urban terrace that presents a place for people to gather and enjoy the view.

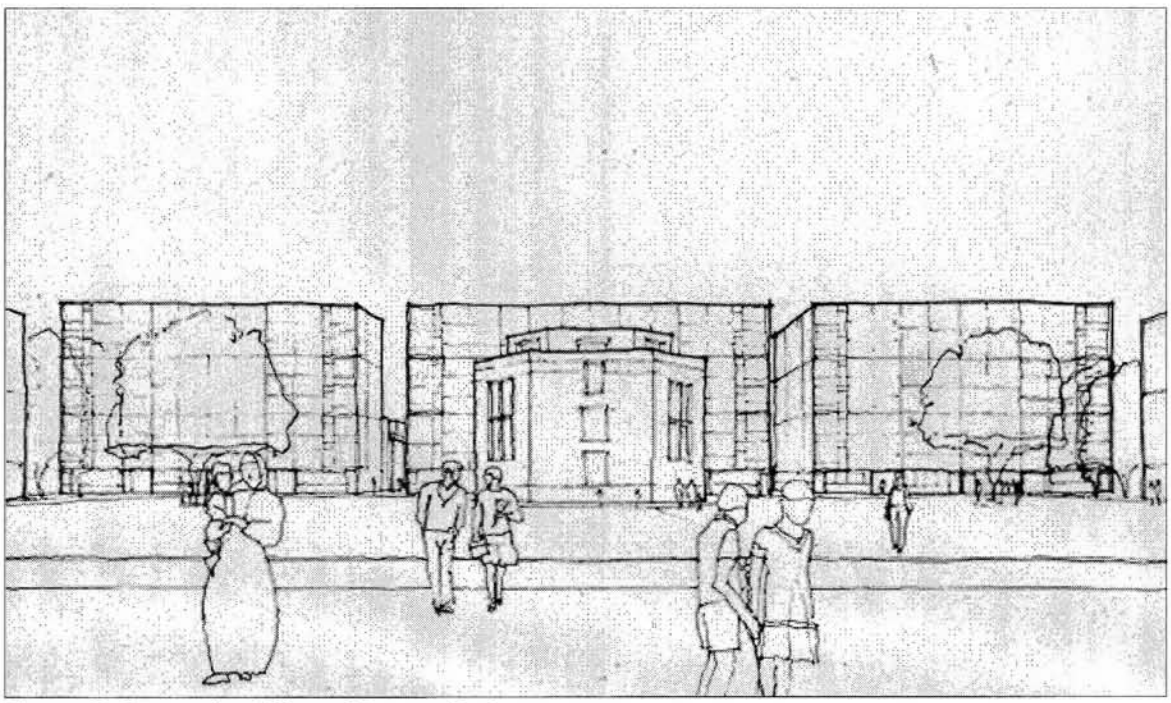


Figure 42: Perspective, View of Octagon Park.

One block north of the Octagon, where the residential fabric ends, is a smaller-scale park. This recreational park spans both sides of Main Street, and is shared by the new neighborhood elementary school and the community's residents (Figure 43).

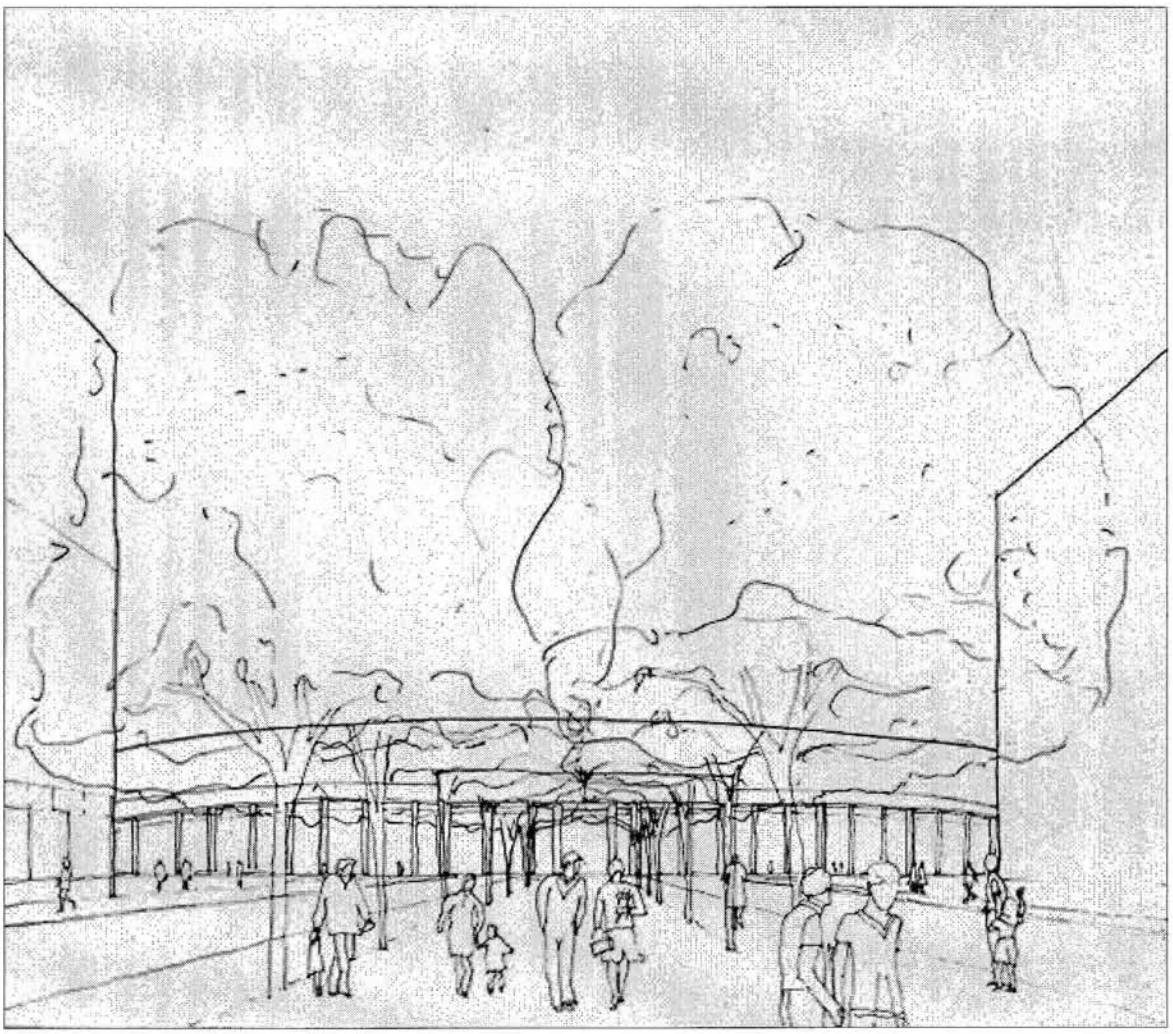


Figure 43: Perspective, View of High School Complex from Main Street.

The plan is completed by a major public park encompassing the northen tip of the island, which was planned as the neighborhood's main recreation space. This space is bordered by the new High School/Athletic Complex, and the reconfigured curved sea walls of the island's

edge. This space is designed as a park-like setting that would combine formal paths and gardens accenting the historic lighthouse, informal paths meandering through groves of trees, and athletic fields to be shared by the school and the community.

The other major component of the proposal considers the development of Roosevelt Island's perimeter. The entire perimeter was thought of as an important element of the public realm, an amenity for the entire community to enjoy. It is conceived as a public promenade composed of a series of parks and green space; a continuous pedestrian path that would present changing views to and from the island, contain a variety of garden-like elements and also be a green buffer between the buildings and the river's edge.

The character of the promenade changes as one moves from one side of the island to the other, and from the southern to the northern end. At the southern tip of the island, the urban plan creates a park that proposes Louis Kahn's 1974 design proposal for the F.D. Roosevelt Memorial be built. Kahn's design called for the tip of the island to be reshaped to create an outdoor "room" that was approached from a tree-lined triangular terrace. (See Figure 44.)

From the FDR Memorial park proceeding north, the park is designed to incorporate the existing landmark buildings: Strecker Laboratory, the Smallpox and Charity Hospitals into the plan. These buildings could be renovated to become cultural pieces in the park, such as art, historical or cultural museums. The promenade would continue on either side of the existing Goldwater Hospital complex, sports building and play fields under the bridge, incorporating them as part of the community plan.

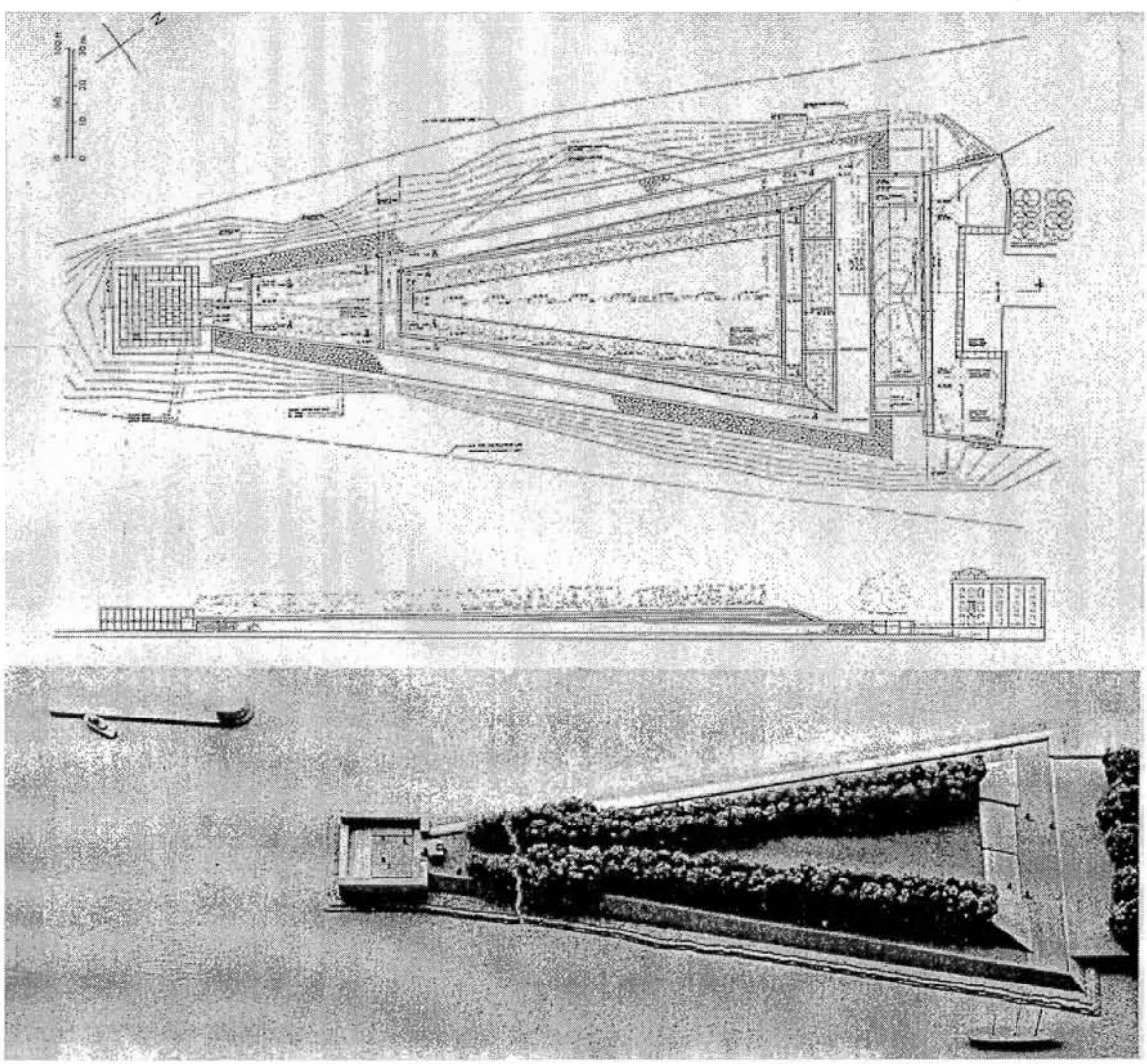


Figure 44: Plan and View of Model, FDR Memorial for Roosevelt Island, by Louis Kahn.

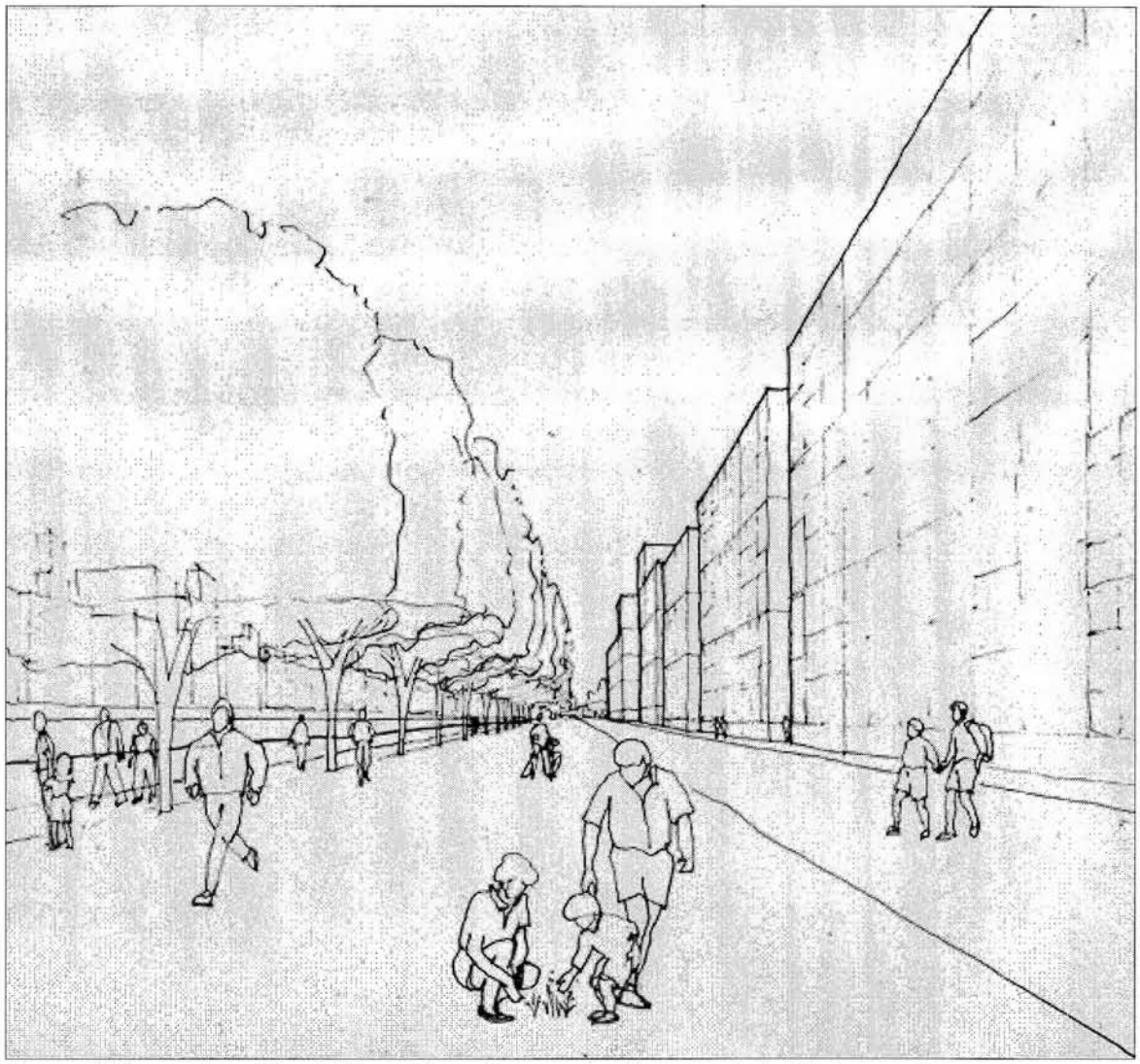


Figure 45: Perspective, View of South Town Promenade, Manhattan in the Background.

Along the river front, the promenade's character changes from the Manhattan to the Queen's side. The promenade on this side of the island is intended to be open in character, and is seen as a more reflective area, separate from the activity and scale of the Manhattan side of the island. On this side of the island, the majority of the perimeter wall would remain unchanged. The path on the Queen's side is a long linear green planted generously with

trees to create a buffer between the loosely defined urban edge, the secondary vehicular street and the seawall along the water's edge.

On the Manhattan side (Figures 45 and 46), the promenade is more active, with the dynamic views toward Manhattan, and the urban fabric of the plan creating a strong built edge. Along this edge, portions of the seawall along the promenade are substantially reconfigured to engage new urban spaces such as the wide steps at South Town's urban square, and the large terraces at the Community Library and North Town's Octagon Park.

Figure 46: Perspective, View of Promenade, with the Queensborough Bridge in the Backgound.

The promenade culminates in a large park at the Northern tip of the island. The profile of the island's tip is reconfigured as a sleek, curved prow-like form, and was designed as a park containing garden "follies" that are encountered throughout the park. The new High School and its soccer field are composed to create a green space. The building becomes a backdrop, and is massed as a long, curved surface carved out to contain the bleachers, while the edge of the play field is bordered by a garden wall punctuated with an entry pavilion. From the play field to the northern tip, the park designed as an informal grove of trees containing both linear and meandering paths. A formal garden element is created at the tip of the island, highlighting the landmark lighthouse structure. A circular space around the lighthouse composed of low garden walls and four pavilions, frames views on the cardinal compass points, to Manhattan, Queens and up the river to Ward's and Randall's Islands.

Part Two: Block Types and Housing Types

Overview

The goals of the housing prototype investigation were to develop housing that sets a standard for defining house at the scale of the individual, architecturally strengthens the urban proposal for Roosevelt Island's completion, and reinforces the social ideals of the existing community's plan.

The plurality of the existing community owes a great deal to the design and social philosophy of the housing that comprises it. The UDC-sponsored Eastwood and Westview housing designed by Sert, Jackson & Associates has been among the most compelling in defining this community's character. From a social viewpoint, the mix of apartment types promotes integration of a variety of family types and sizes within the neighborhood. In addition, the UDC's funding programs have also resulted in low-, moderate- and middle- income families and the elderly becoming incorporated in the community, rather than separated. At the scale the urban plan, the three-dimensional composition of the block is skillfully manipulated to define the public realm of Main Street, to define the private green space of the block's interior, and to recognize views toward Manhattan and Queens. At the scale of the individual, the housing design using the point-access, skip-stop corridor aspires to set a standard for apartment units that maximize exposure to light, air and views.

While the existing neighborhood and its housing provided a successful community at several levels, and has set a strong social and architectural precedent for future development, there

was also the opportunity to propose a housing type as a counterpoint. The housing investigation eventually expanded to include provide two distinct prototypes: one based on achieving high-density development, and one promoting low-density development.

The development of the two housing types, and subsequently two urban block types also attempted to address the economic realities of proposing a low-rise housing neighborhood on Roosevelt Island. The design proposal recognized that a substantial portion of the island would need to be densely developed in order for the proposition of a low-rise neighborhood to be economically feasible. From both an urban and housing viewpoint, a conceptual framework was established to develop a higher-rise, higher-density neighborhood on the southern portion of the island directly adjacent to the existing Main Street, while the northern portion above the Motorgate garage would be planned as the alternative low-rise, low-density neighborhood.

In the course of designing these two neighborhoods and two housing types, the goal was to set a standard that would architecturally define an individual's sense of community and a sense of place. Precedents were analyzed which embodied planning concepts that could be incorporated into the design of either prototype. One important concept the selected precedents contained were apartments designed as through-block units, which allow for light, air and cross-ventilation from two sides, with more of the living spaces having direct access to natural light. This through-block concept for the units also meant the interior spaces could engage both the public street edge and private interior of urban block, and the interior spaces

of the apartment could be organized to relate to either face, and change character depending on the relationship. The precedents also used various planning strategies to provide for a mix of unit types. This was an important concept to promote a more diverse community that integrates a variety of family sizes and living situations into the housing fabric.

In the following sections, the urban blocks and housing that comprise the proposal will be examined in more detail. Because of the difference in the composition and character of the two neighborhoods, South Town and North Town are discussed separately. For each neighborhood, the relationship between the neighborhood's urban block and housing design, the specific housing precedents that influenced the investigation, and the resulting prototype design will be discussed.

South Town Blocks & Housing Prototype

The new South Town neighborhood's urban block structure conceptually echos the massing, type and density of the existing blocks, but also represents a departure from the existing block structure. Rather than defining Main Street as a continuous wall, this neighborhood is composed of a series of blocks that differentiate Main Street, cross-island streets and urban squares. In plan, the blocks' urban footprint takes cues from the scale established in the existing urban structure. Their widths range from 230 to 270 feet, and vary from 220 feet deep on the Manhattan side of Main Street up to 270 feet deep on the Queens' side.

The housing prototypes were designed and combined to volumetrically manipulate the block's massing, defining various vertical scales of the streets, urban and green spaces of the urban plan (Figure 47). The new blocks are massed to continue the strong urban wall on Main Street begun by the existing housing facades. The edges of the blocks fronting on Main Street are punctuated at the corners by taller, tower-like pieces that are thirteen stories high, with the bar in between the corner pieces stepping down to seven stories. The street level of the blocks is designed to interface between the public edge of the street and the private entries of the housing. This base contains a series of lobbies for the housing above, with the space in between containing retail and commercial space, while the block's interior space is designed as a private green space and play area for the residents.

The urban fabric of South Town is composed of various block configurations that differentiate the Manhattan and Queens sides of the neighborhood. Toward Manhattan, there are two courtyard blocks that are volumetrically composed to capitalize on the aesthetic and real estate value of the Manhattan views. These blocks' river front edges present a wall-like facade toward Manhattan as well as define a strong edge to the river-walk promenade. The corners are tower-like pieces that are 16 stories tall, with the bar in between stepping down to ten stories. The Queens side of the neighborhood is composed of U-shaped blocks. Most

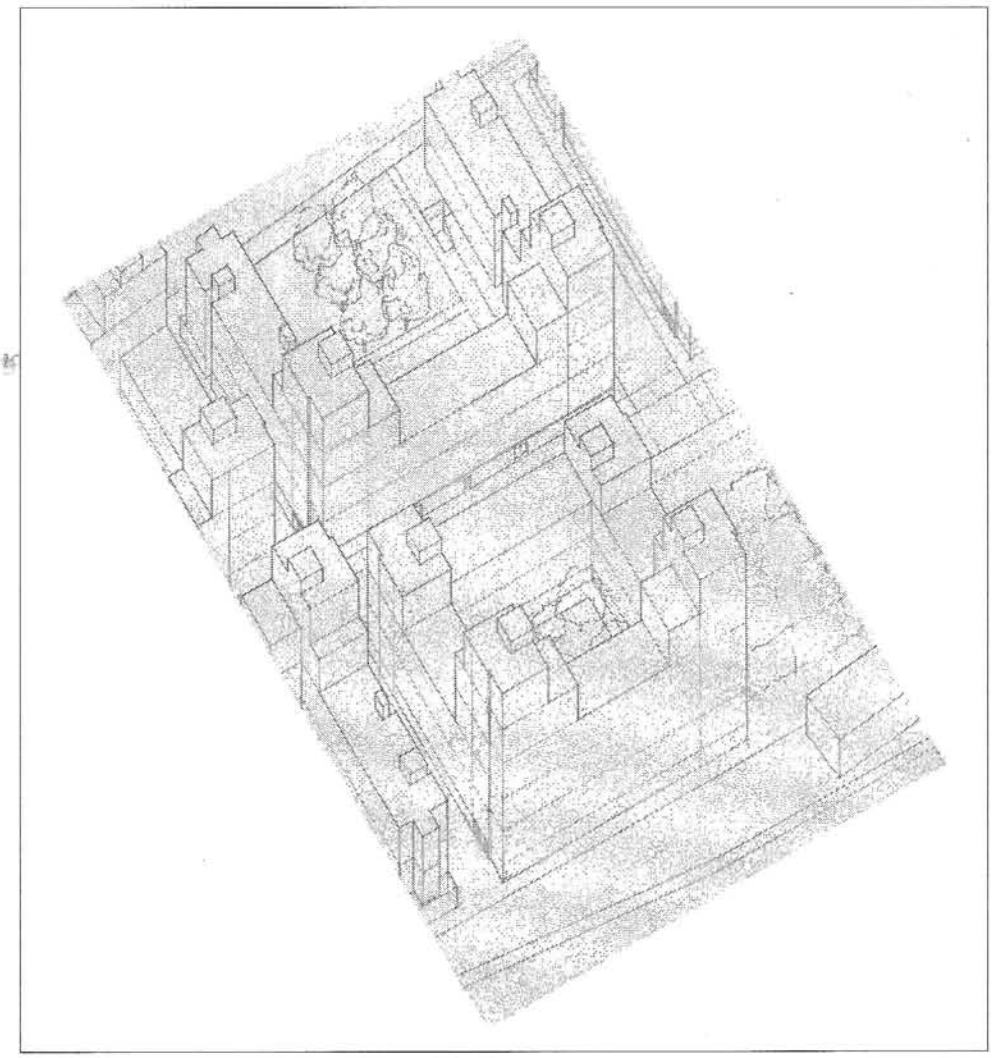


Figure 47: Axonometric, South Town Blocks

of the blocks open towards Queens and echo the massing of some of the existing urban fabric, with the arms of the U-shaped blocks starting at thirteen stories at the street stepping down to seven stories at the river edge.

The blocks are composed of a housing prototype based on a point-access, skip-stop corridor system. The design of the units within the prototypical packages investigated systems that

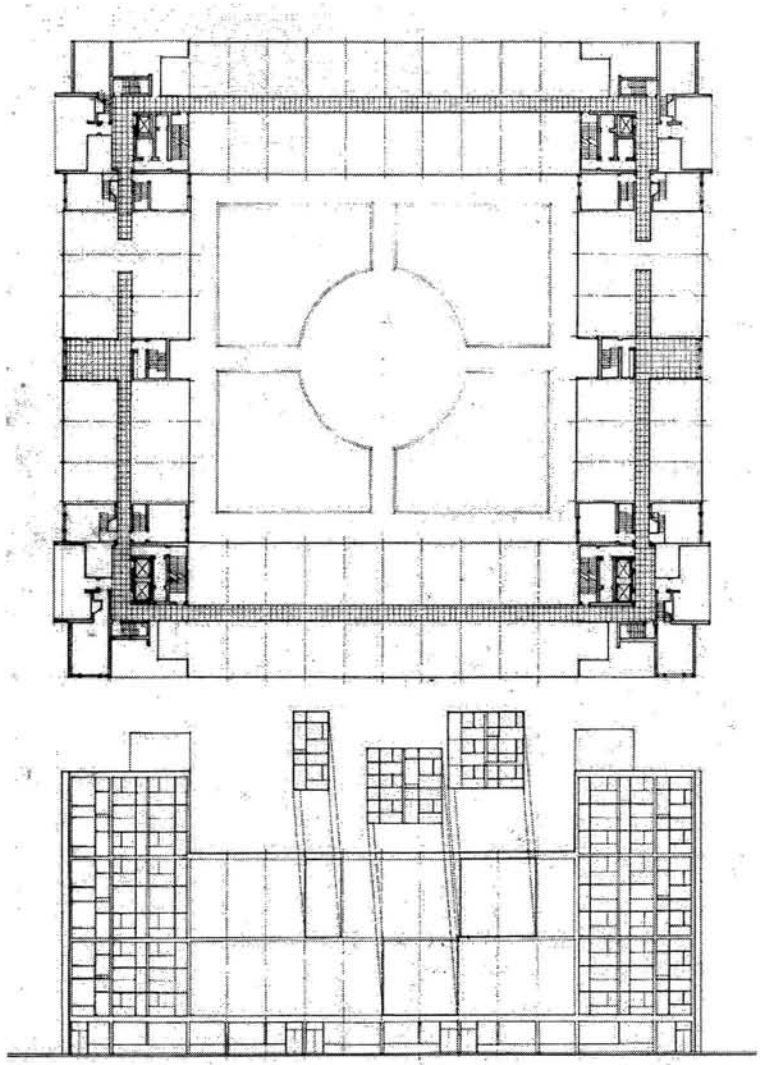


Figure 48: South Town Block, Conceptual Plan and Elevation

would provide for a wide variety and combination of unit types, while attempting to minimize circulation corridors and provide a generous living space for the individual. In final form, this type was designed as a three-story package that allows for a corridor every third floor, and also incorporates a spacious 1½ story living room in the apartment unit plans.

The blocks are thought of as a frame into which a variety of prototype packages are inserted (Figure 48). Specific prototypical packages were designed to address the corner and middle condition of the block, and incorporate entry lobbies, fire egress stairs, circulation corridors and core services in their design. For the U-shaped blocks, a specific housing package was developed to terminate the ends of the arms, with a special unit designed to place the living spaces toward light and views available on three surfaces. Other apartment packages were developed based on either one or two structural bays which would fill the space in between the corner, middle and end pieces. The one- and two-bay packages can be combined in many variations to compose the block's volumetric outline and achieve a specific mix of unit types.

Like the housing that comprises the existing community, the new blocks would be composed of a mix of unit types, ranging from studios to 4-bedrooms, to provide housing for a variety of family sizes and income levels. The housing in this neighborhood would also aspire to continue the community's philosophy of integrating the elderly and low- to middle-income families.

The block's internal composition used attributes of the point-access, skip-stop system to promote a sense of community and security. The blocks were designed with a system of multiple point-access lobbies within a block, reinforcing a sense of community by allowing residents to routinely encounter and recognize a set of neighbors using the same entry. The skip-stop corridors were designed to be as minimal in length as possible to limit the number of apartment entries on a corridor; this was viewed as a means to reinforce a sense of community. Again, one is more likely to repeatedly encounter and recognize a set group of neighbors, enhancing a sense of community and safety. Even with these devices, it is still difficult to define a sense of "house" for the individual within these larger urban blocks. Consequently, the concept of providing a spatially generous, 1½ story living space within the individual apartment units was viewed as a means of providing a sense of identity at the scale of the individual.

In the thesis study, the development of this housing prototype incorporated planning concepts from several modern housing precedents, most notably Wells Coate's Palace Gate apartments (Figures 49 through 56), van den Broek & Bakema's Hansaviertel Tower (Figures 63 and 64), and also drew upon complexes designed by Sert, Jackson & Associates (Figures 57 through 62), including Roosevelt Island's existing housing complexes, Eastwood and Westview, and the Riverview complex. All of these precedents are based on a skip-stop corridor system, which manipulate the unit's design to vertically wrap above and below the corridor.

The precedent which had the most influence on the housing prototype's development was designed in 1930 by Well Coates, in London: an apartment type that provided a 1 ½ story living space within an apartment. The building is also design using the point-access, skip stop system, with a corridor occurring every third floor. The overall design also incorporated the concept of creating a corridor of limited length, which groups a small number of apartments entries.

London Apartments, Well Coates, Plans and Exterior Photos

Figure 50: Exterior View

Figure 49: Exterior Views

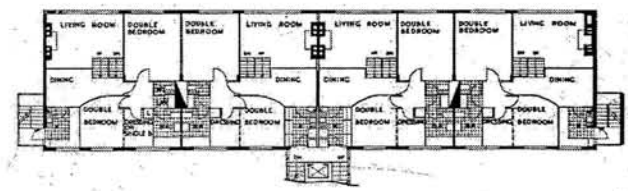


Figure 53: Plan One Level above Corridor

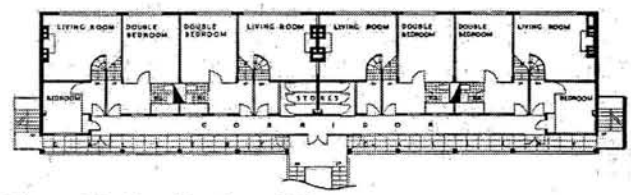


Figure 52: Corridor Level Plan

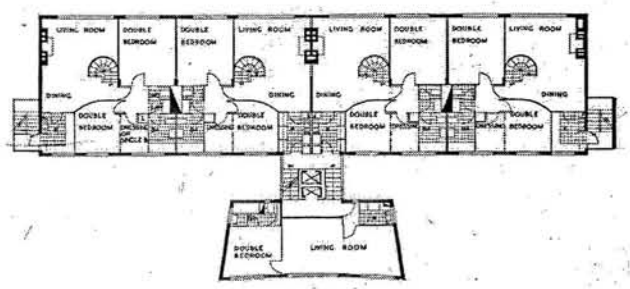


Figure 51: Plan One Level below Corridor

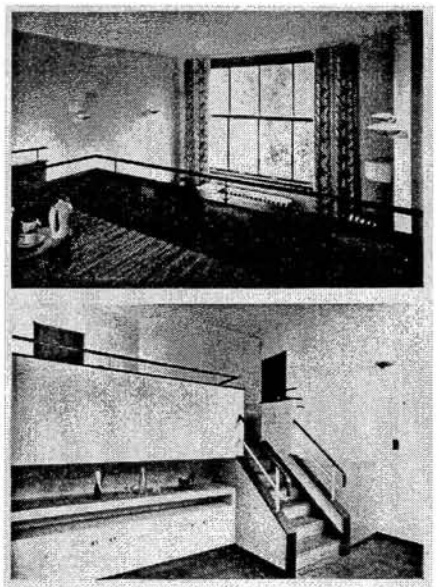


Figure 54: Interior Views

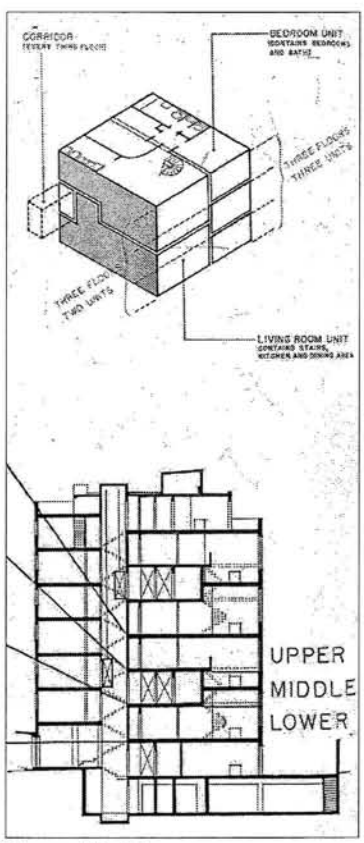


Figure 55: Diagrams

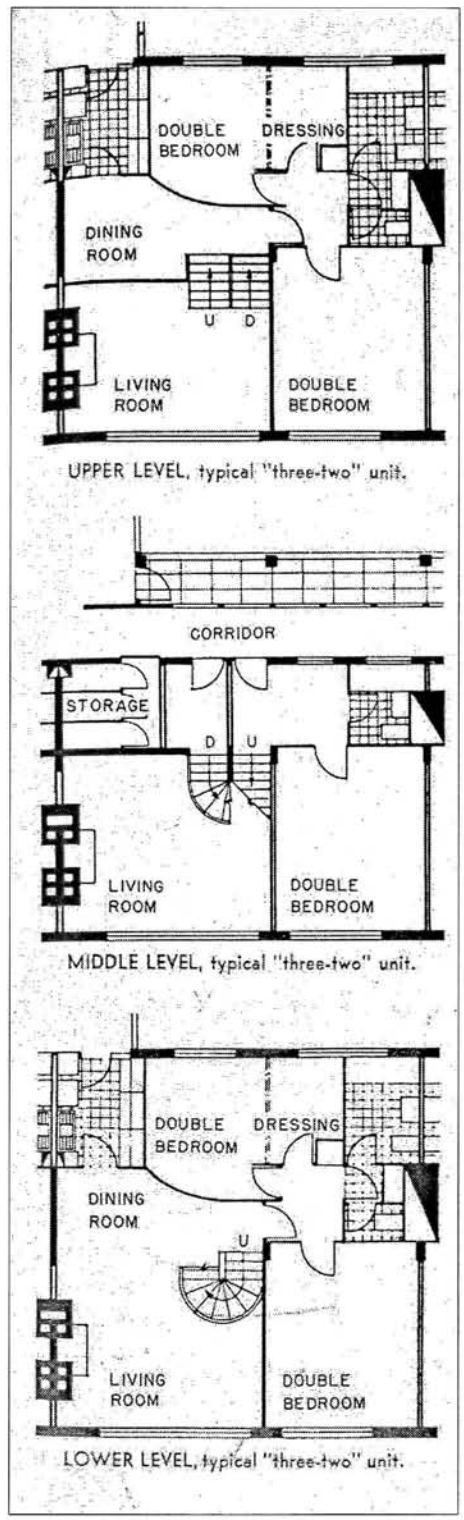


Figure 56: Unit Floor Plans

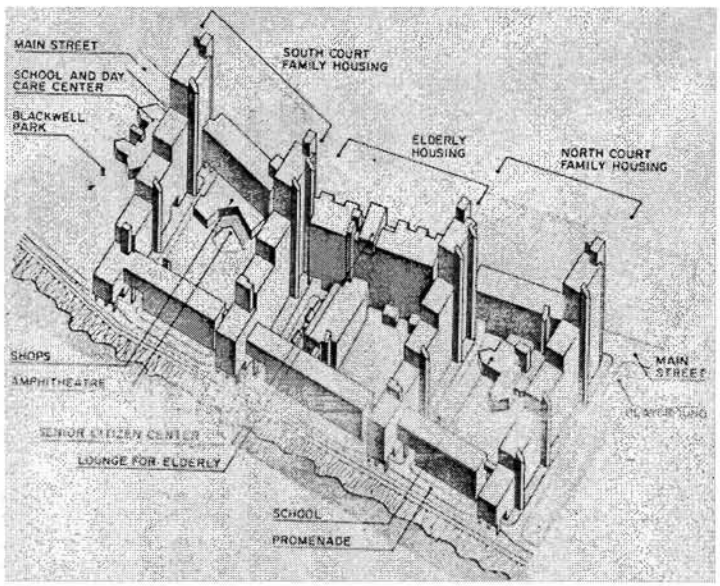


Figure 57: Eastwood Diagram

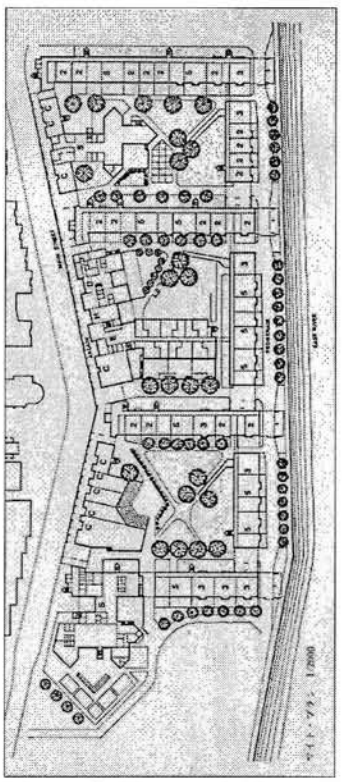


Figure 58: Eastwood, Site Plan

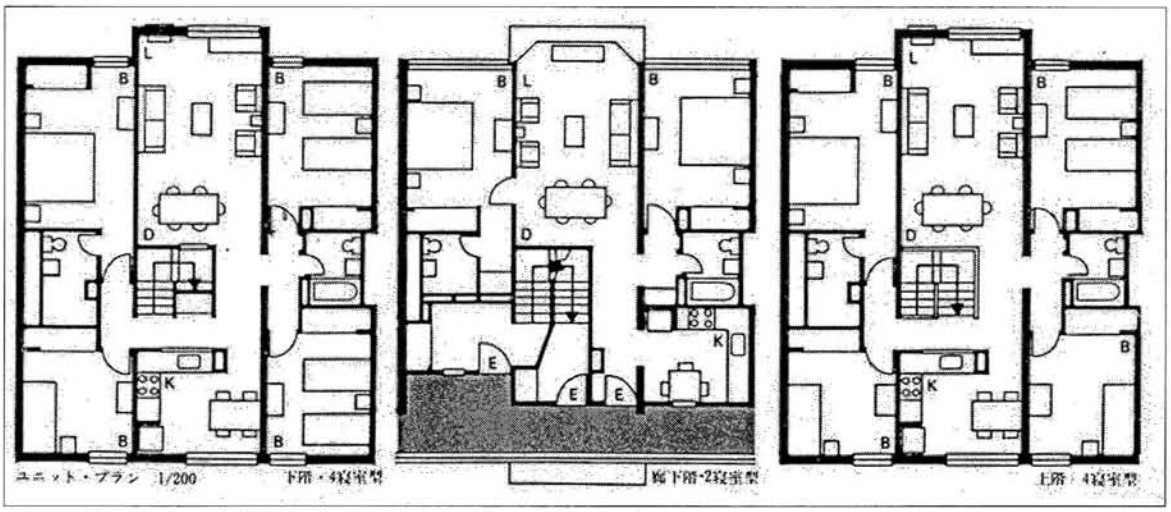


Figure 59: Eastwood, Floor Plans, Corridor Level Plan in Center

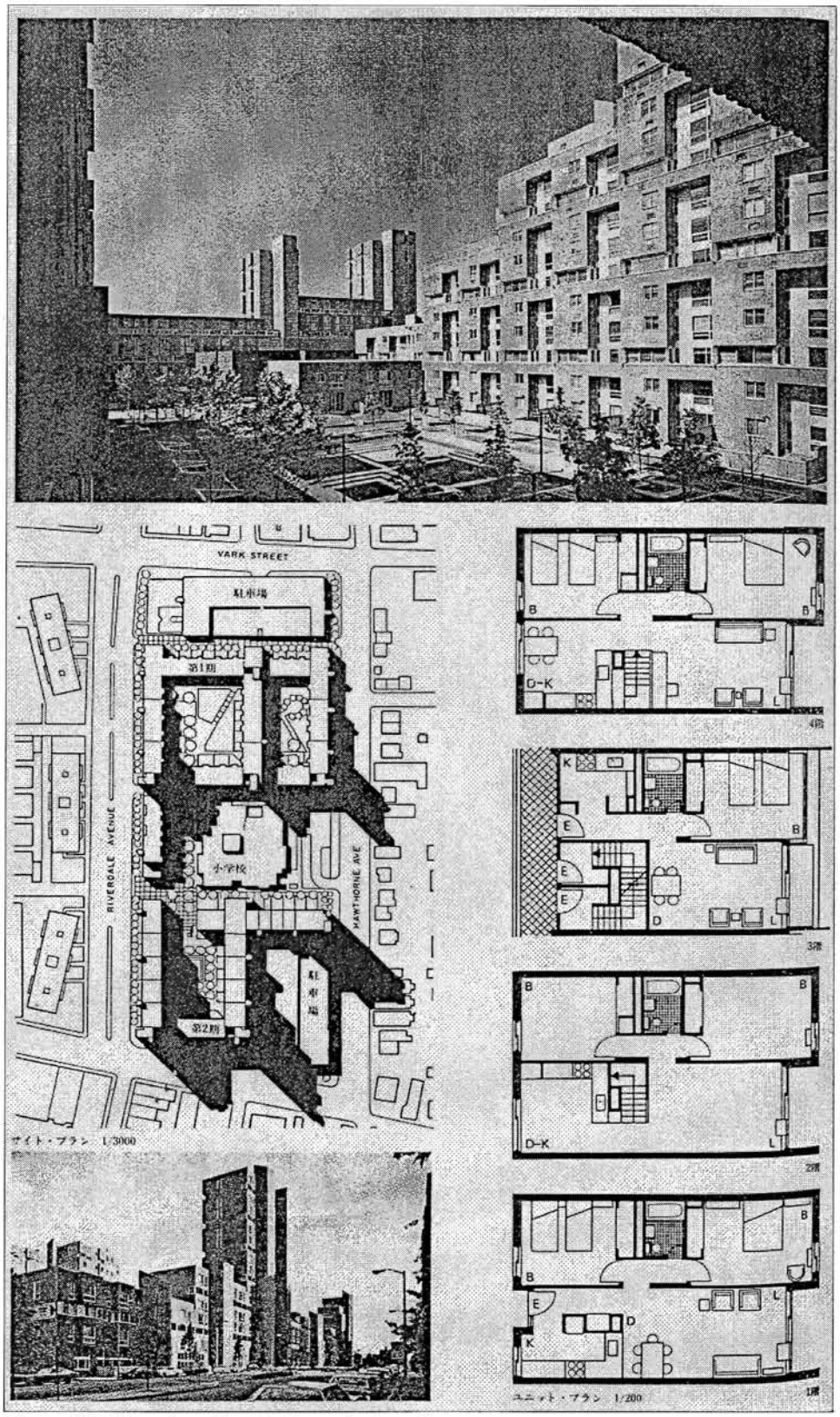


Figure 60: Riverview, Sert Jackson & Associates

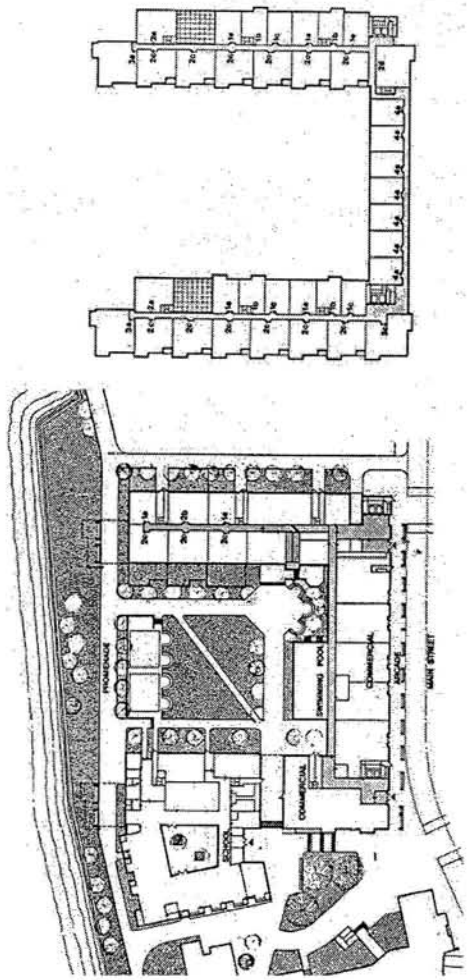


Figure 61: Westview Site and Building Plan

Figure 62: Westview, Sert Jackson & Associates, Unit Plans

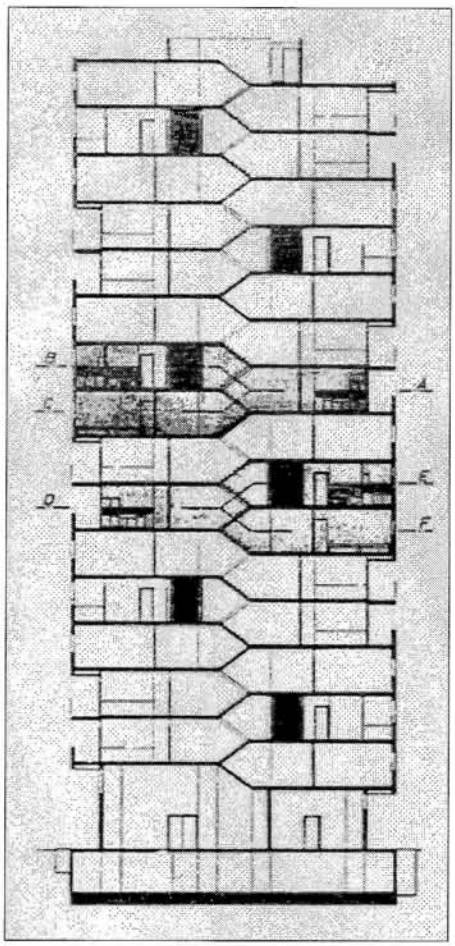


Figure 63: Hansaviertel Tower Section

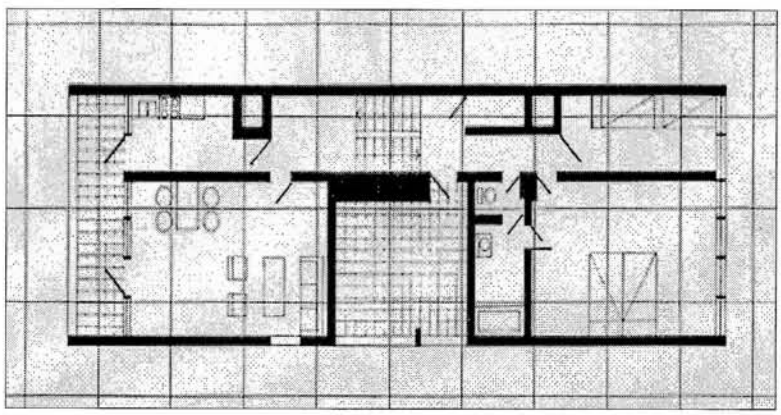


Figure 64: Hansaviertel Tower, Unit Plan

The focus of the design of the various units types was to provide the 1½ story living space for as many types of units as possible, and developed prototype packages that provide for a variety of unit mixes ranging from studios to 4-bedrooms. The unit design successfully incorporated a 1½ story living space for 1, 2, 3 and 4-bedroom units, while the studio apartments within the packages were designed as flats. (See the tables following this section for the analysis of the various packages developed and unit square footage.)

The general attitude taken in the layout of the individual units was to delineate the public and private sides of the block by orienting the living room to the more public, street side of the block, while placing most of the bedrooms on the more private interior of the block. The individual unit design also opened up the interior layout, with minimum separation between living, dining and kitchen areas to allow light and air to penetrate. The layout of the units above and below corridor level also was planned to optimize through-block views and cross ventilation (refer to figures 64 through 76 for unit floor plans, sections, and study model photographs). The unit design also worked with HUD, FHA & Housing and Home Finance Agency guidelines as a reference for target square footage for these housing prototypes. (See tables in Appendix One.)

Type A: Flexible Infill Packages

The prototype packages can be arranged to infill the urban block's structural bay in many combinations to achieve a specific target mix of apartment types (see Tables 1 through 3; and Figures 65 through 73.)

TABLE 1
APARTMENT UNIT MIX, 1-BAY PACKAGE

Apartment Type	Sq. Ft.	No./package	Comments
1 Bedroom	570	1	1 ½ story living space
2 Bedroom	650	1	1 ½ story living space

TABLE 2
APARTMENT UNIT MIX, 2-BAY PACKAGE

Apartment Type	Sq. Ft.	No./package	Comments
Studio	460	1	Flat
3 Bedroom	1,140	1	1 ½ story living space
4 Bedroom	1,370	1	1 ½ story living space

TABLE 3
APARTMENT UNIT MIX, 2-BAY PACKAGE, ALL FLATS

Apartment Type	Sq. Ft.	No./package	Comments
Studio	400	1	Flat
1 Bedroom	460	1	Flat
3 Bedroom	1,140	2	Flat

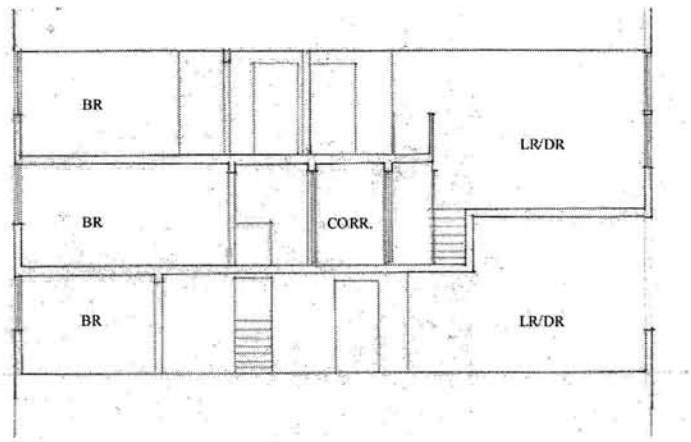


Figure 67: Section Through Apartment Package

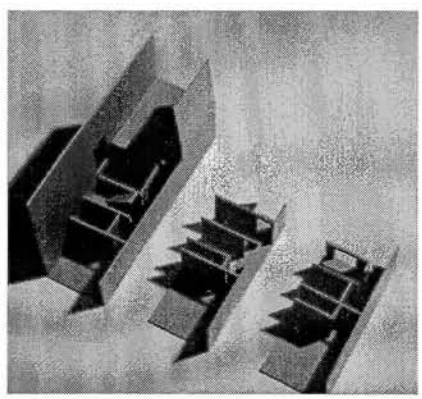


Figure 65: 1-bay Package, Photo of Study Model

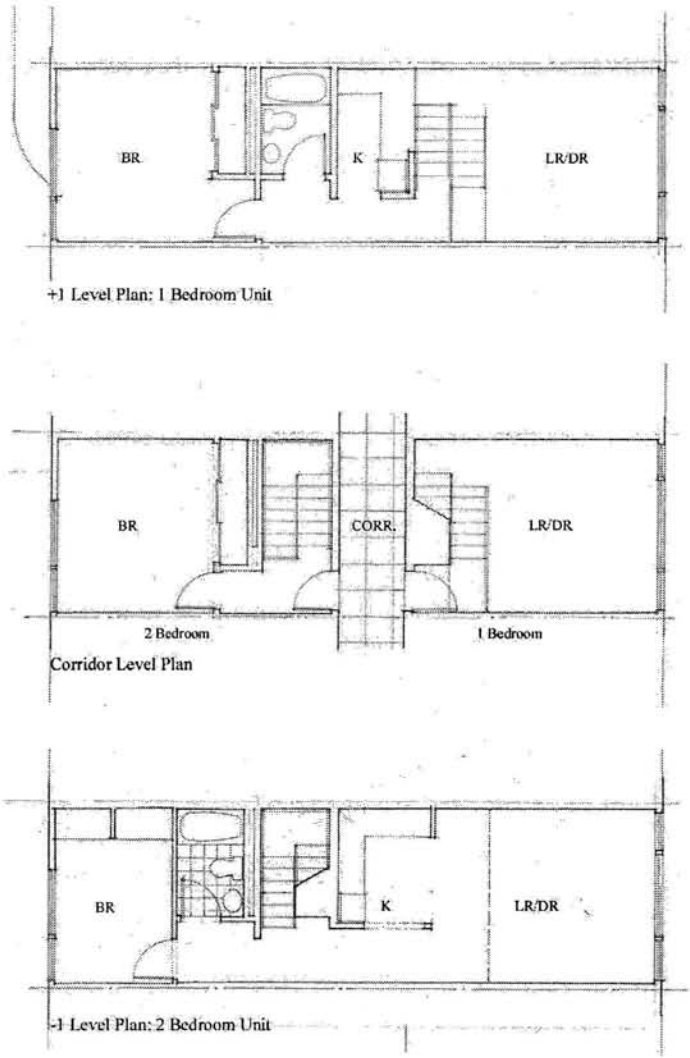


Figure 66: Plans, 1-bay Package

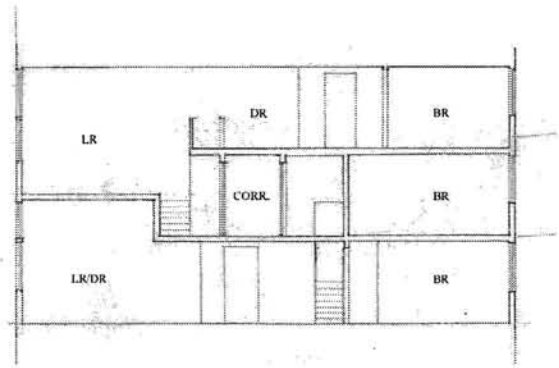


Figure 70: Section Through Apartment Package

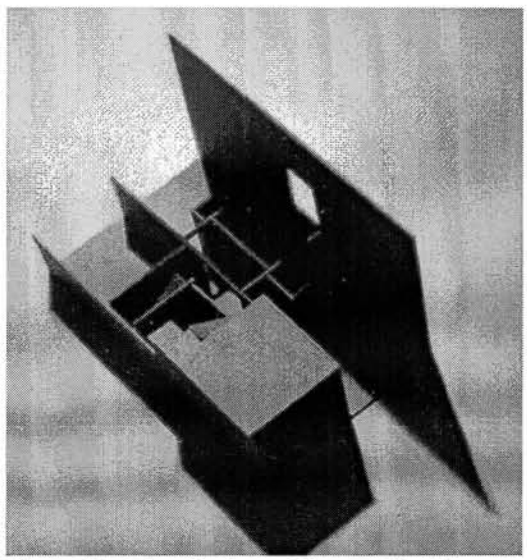


Figure 68: 2-bay Package, Photo of Study Model

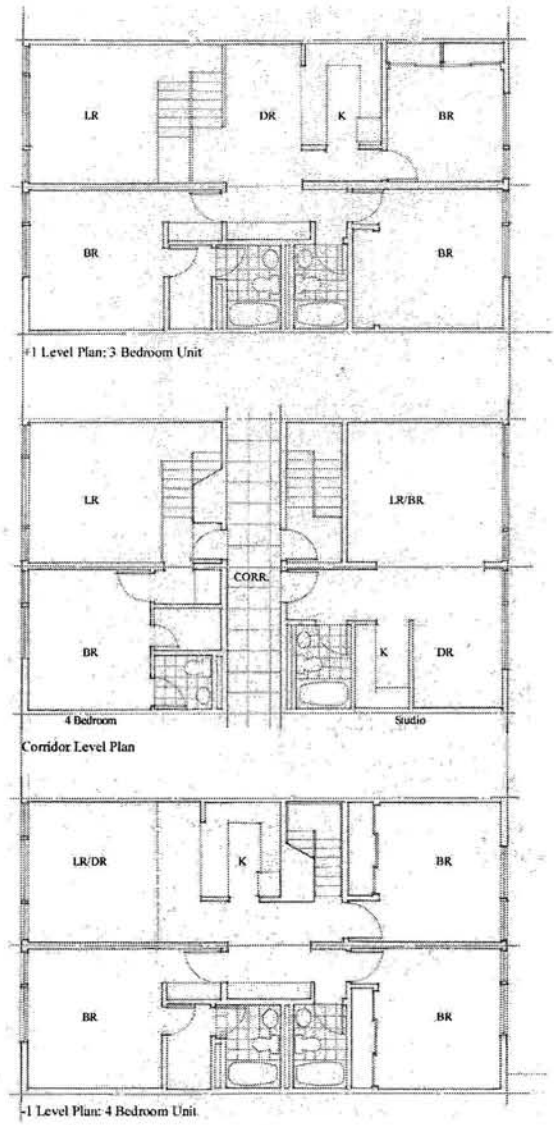


Figure 69: Plans, 2-bay Package

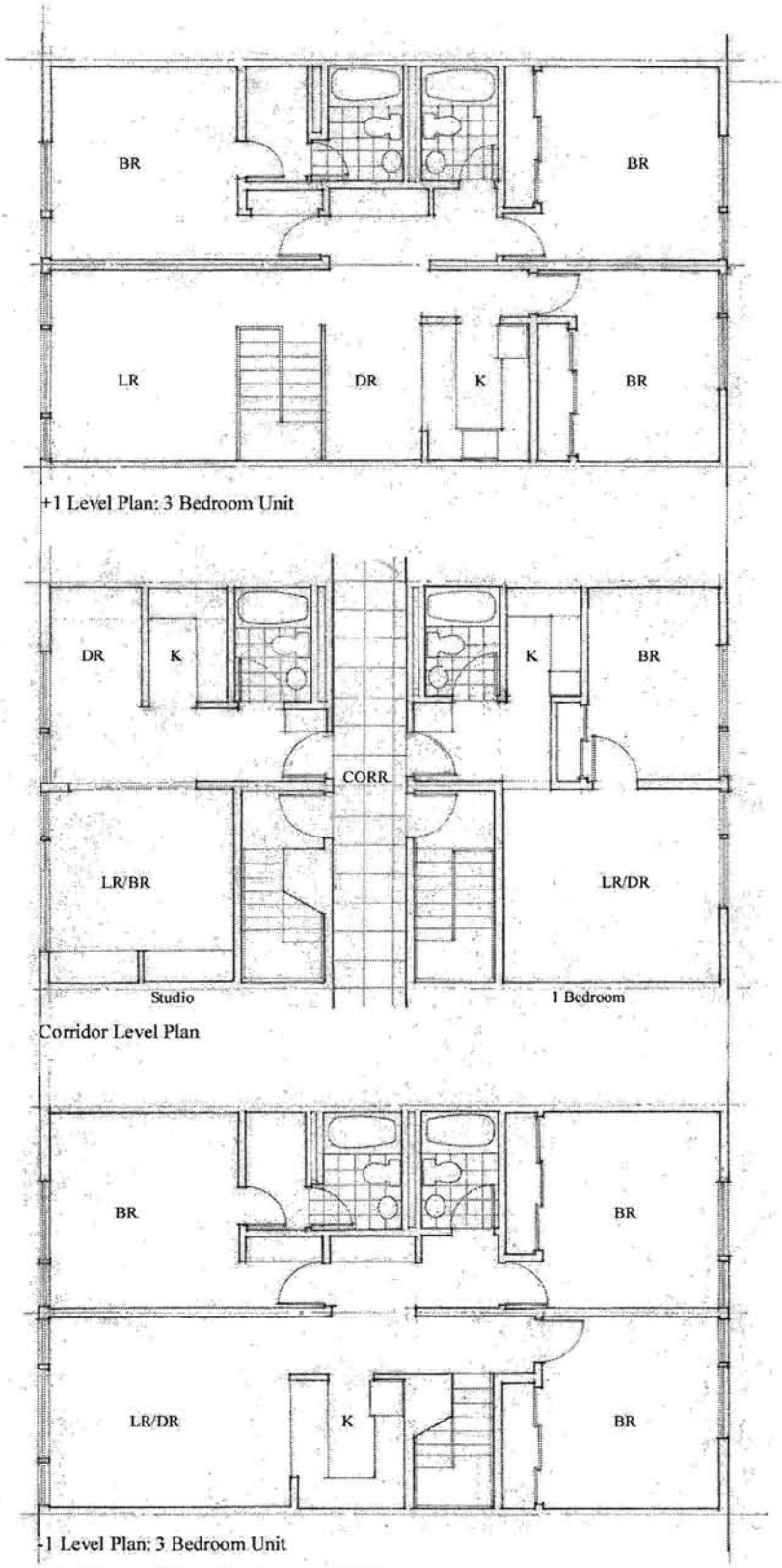


Figure 71: Plans, 2 Bay Package, All Flats

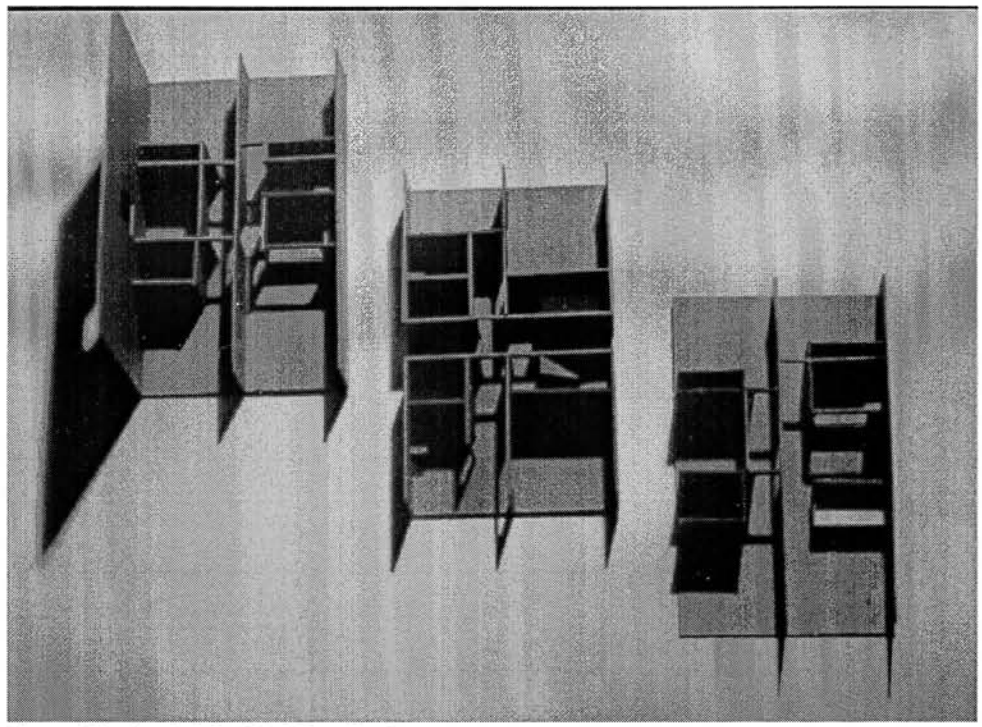


Figure 72: Study Model, 2 Bay Package

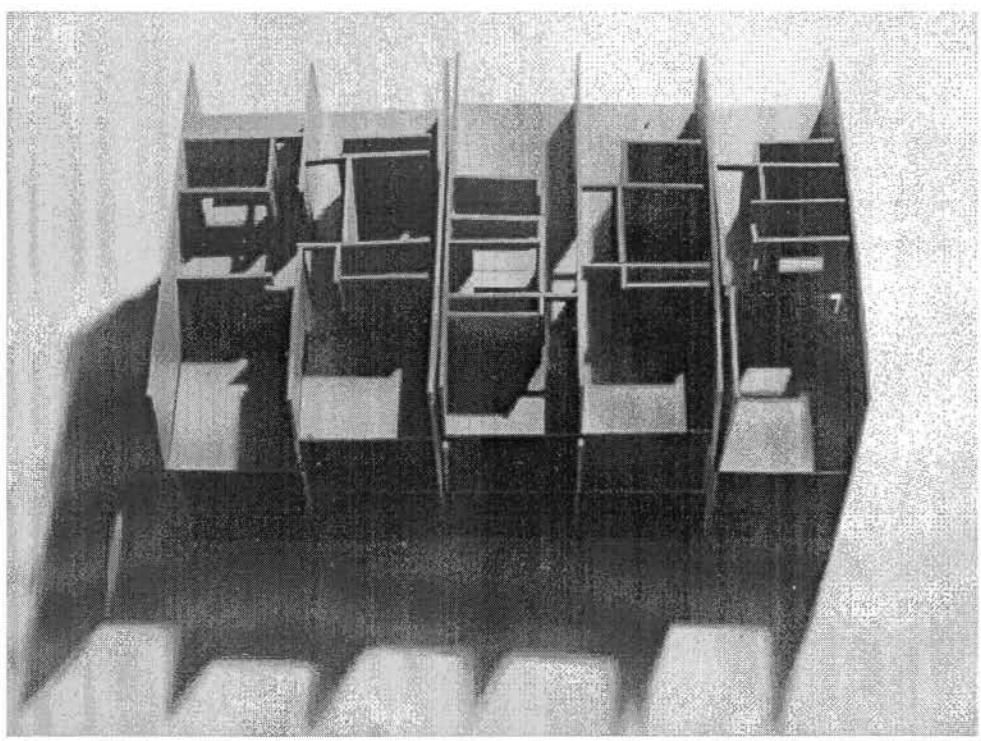


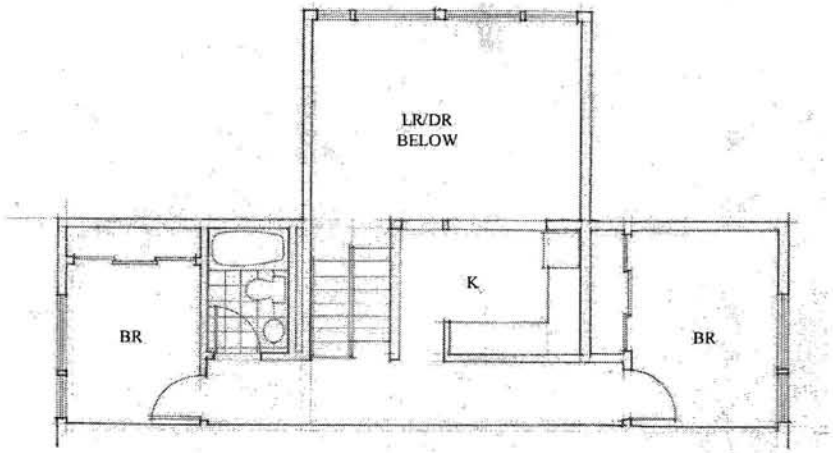
Figure 73: Study Models Grouped Packages

Type B: Special Condition

Package for end-of-bar lock of U-shaped housing blocks (see table 4 and figure 74).

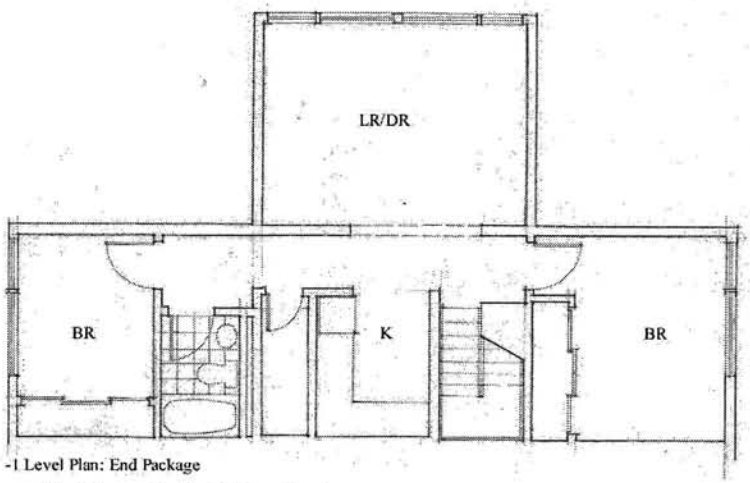
TABLE 4
APARTMENT UNIT MIX, 2-BAY END-OF-BAR PACKAGE

Apartment Type	Sq. Ft.	No./package	Comments
3 Bedroom	1 @ 960 1 @ 980	2	1 ½ story living space



+1 Level Plan: End Package

Corridor Level Plan: End Package



-1 Level Plan: End Package

Figure 74: Plans, End- Of-bar Package

Type C: Vertical Circulation and Core Elements

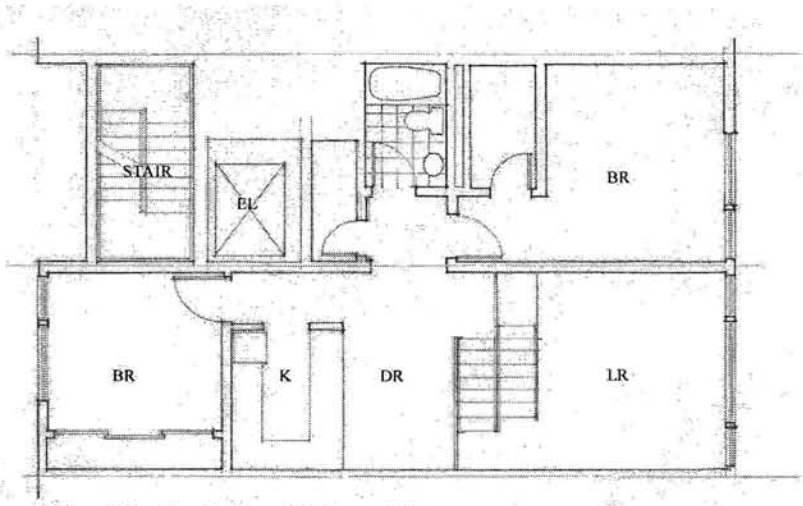
Packages containing with vertical circulation and core elements (see Tables 5 and 6; Figures 75 and 76.)

TABLE 5
APARTMENT UNIT MIX, 2-BAY, MIDDLE-OF-BLOCK PACKAGE
(INCLUDES ELEVATOR, FIRE STAIR & CORE SERVICES)

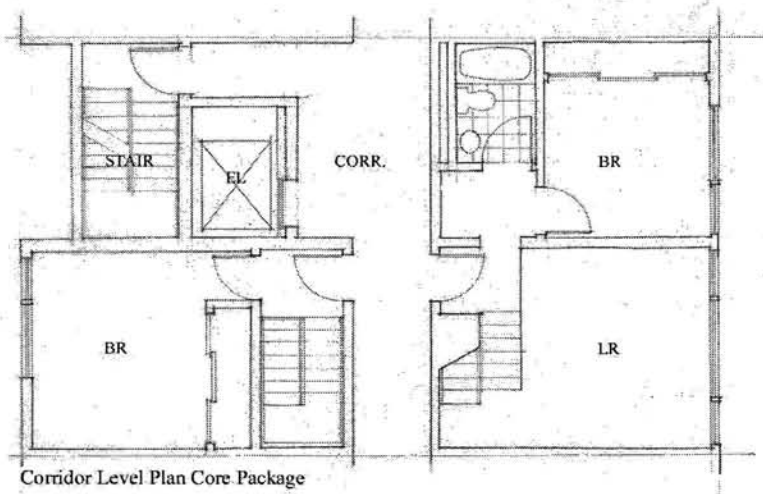
Apartment Type	Sq. Ft.	No./package	Comments
3 Bedroom	1,090	2	1 ½ story living space

TABLE 6
APARTMENT UNIT MIX, CORNER PACKAGE
(INCLUDES 2 ELEVATORS, FIRE STAIRS & CORE SERVICES)

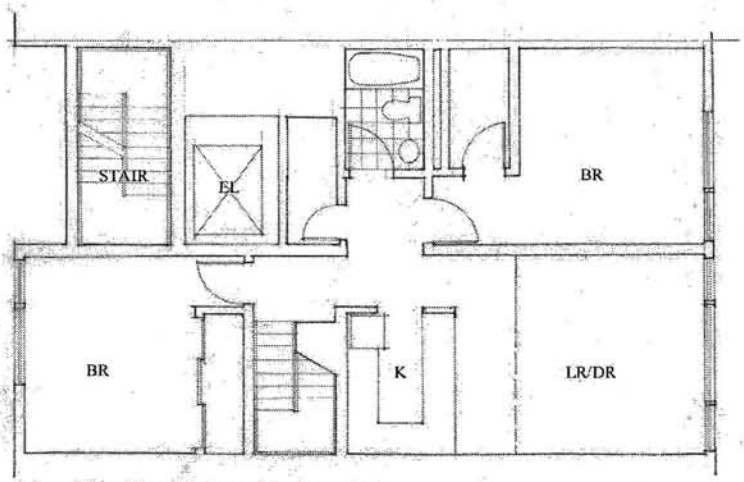
Apartment Type	Sq. Ft.	No./package	Comments
Studio	1 @ 350 1 @ 410	2	Flat
2 Bedroom	780	1	1 ½ story living space
3 Bedroom	1 @ 860 2 @ 1,180	3	1 ½ story living space



+1 Level Plan Core Package: 3 Bedroom Unit

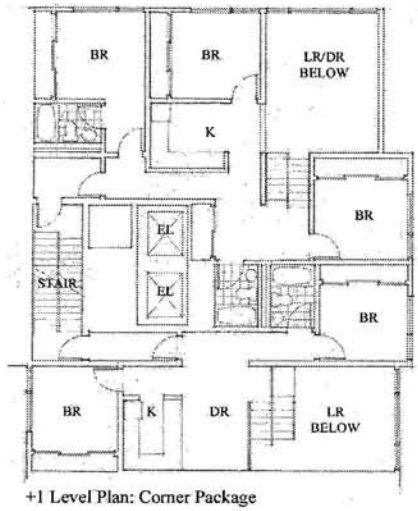


Corridor Level Plan Core Package

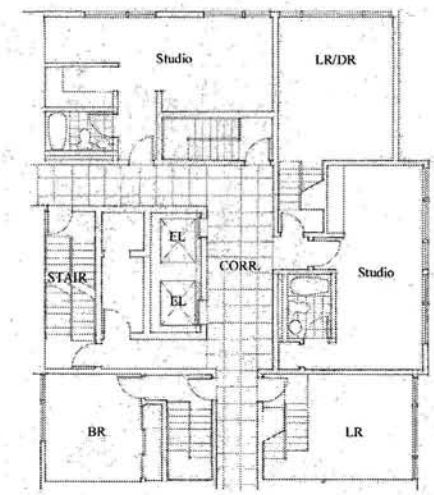


-1 Level Plan Core Package: 3 Bedroom Unit

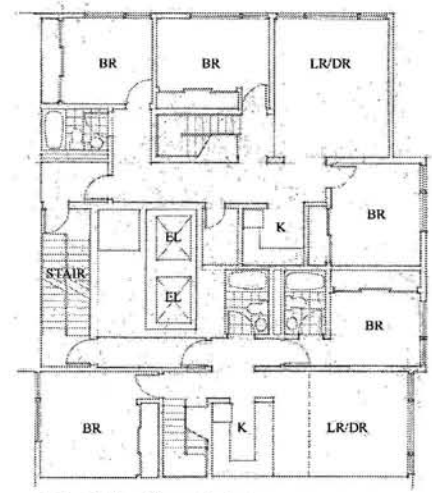
Figure 75: Plans, Core Package



+1 Level Plan: Corner Package



Corridor Level Plan: Corner Package



-1 Level Plan: Corner Package

Figure 76: Plans, Corner Package

North Town Blocks/Housing Prototype

The blocks of the North Town neighborhood were developed as a housing and urban counterpoint to the scale of the proposed South Town neighborhood. The North Town blocks have a smaller urban footprint, 140 feet wide by 220 feet long towards Queens and 140 feet wide by 300 feet long toward Manhattan. They are also three-dimensionally at a smaller scale, primarily four stories, ranging to a maximum of nine stories (Figures 77 and 78). The urban fabric for this end of the island recalls the low-rise, high-density precedents, but also the volume and scale of the older, row-house, brownstone block fabric within Manhattan.

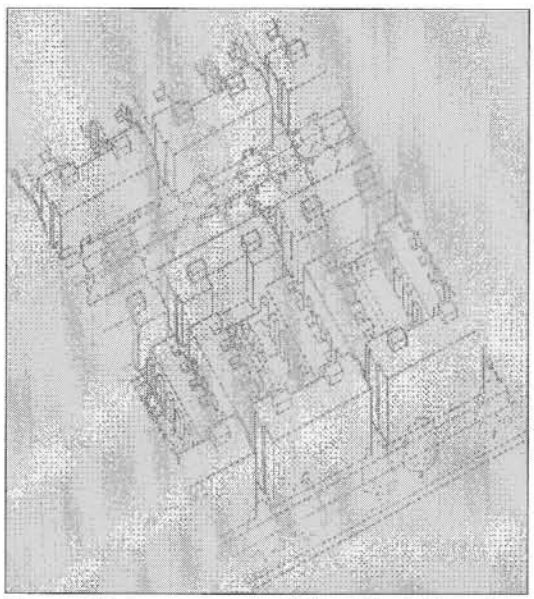


Figure 77: Axonometric, Urban Block Massing, Courtyard Blocks.

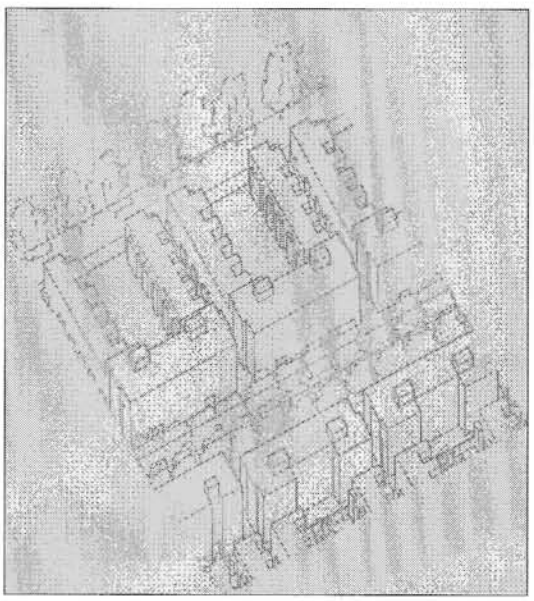


Figure 78: Axonometric, Urban Block Massing, U-shaped Blocks.

The blocks were also composed to create a more intimate and identifiable scale to the street, and to mediate between the public nature of the street and the private nature of the housing.

Several strategies were developed for defining the public and private realm of the neighborhood. In this neighborhood, a majority of the cross-streets are designed as pedestrian only, with Main Street and a limited number of cross streets carrying vehicular traffic. The U-shaped blocks opening toward Queens are raised on a plinth, which separates vehicular and pedestrian traffic. The plinth contains parking for residents' cars below and is accessed from a minor vehicular street along the edge of the block. The top of the plinth is developed as an interior green space to the block, to be shared by block residents as a safe play area for children, protected from vehicular traffic and the neighborhood streets (Figure 79). The blocks on the Manhattan side of the neighborhood are similar in scale, but differ in their composition. These blocks are composed as closed courtyards that volumetrically emphasize the Manhattan edge. These blocks also contain a shared green space for residents, but are not designed with a raised plinth.

The design of both the U-shaped and courtyard blocks eventually evolved to combined both the point-access, skip-stop housing prototype and the low-rise prototype, with the low-rise housing comprising the majority of the neighborhood. The ends of the urban blocks on Main Street are comprised of the point access, skip-stop prototype, which has been massed as a six-story- high bar. At street level, there are two lobbies that service this bar of housing, with commercial space in between. The ends of the blocks facing the Octagon Park and Manhattan are also composed of the skip-stop prototype, massed as a ten-story-high bar.

The housing along the pedestrian cross-streets is composed as a four-story package of flats comprised of four individual apartment units, with the four units sharing a common entry and stair. Each package of the bar is composed of two-bay-wide units containing four units total: two, 2-bedroom and two, 3-bedroom.

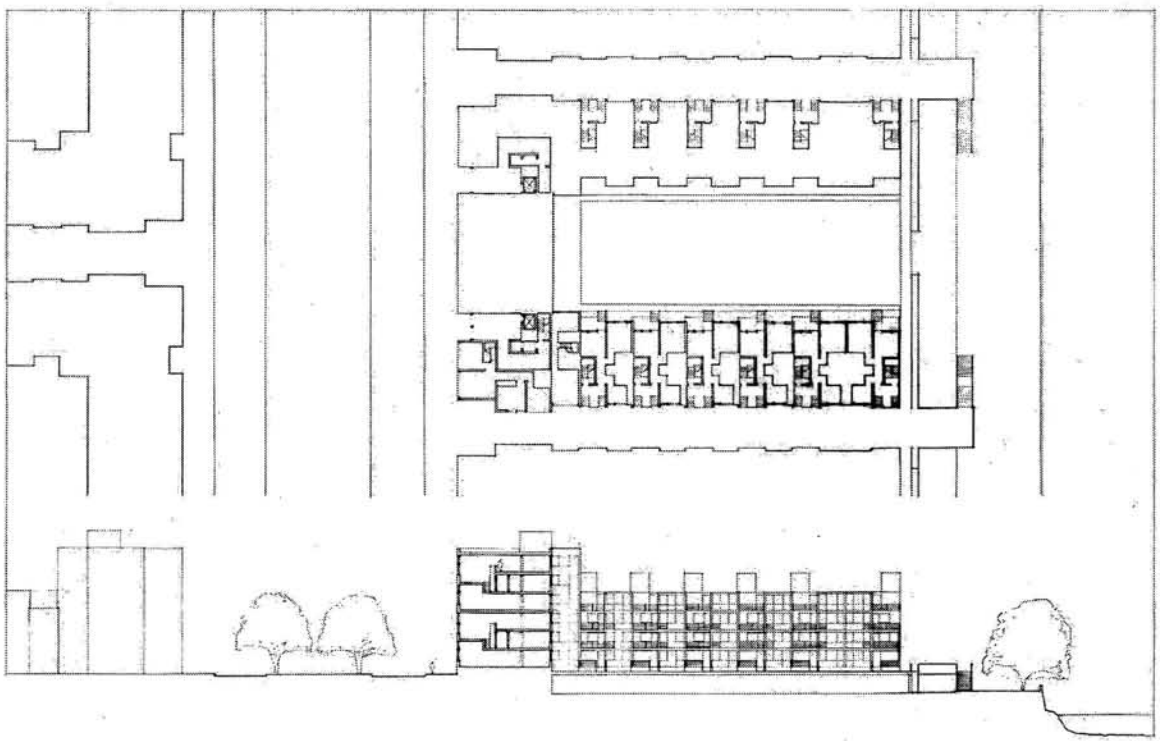


Figure 79: Plan and Section, Residential Block.

The design of this prototype was greatly influenced by the earlier research of the Institute for Architecture and Urban Studies and the UDC's low-rise, high-density projects (Figures 81 and 82), most notably Marcus Garvey Park Village in Brooklyn (Figures 86 - 89) ; Fox Hill

housing in Staten Island (Figures 83 - 85); and Mott Haven Infill in the South Bronx (Figure 80) , but also drew upon the scale and character of Manhattan's older brownstone row-house residential fabric.

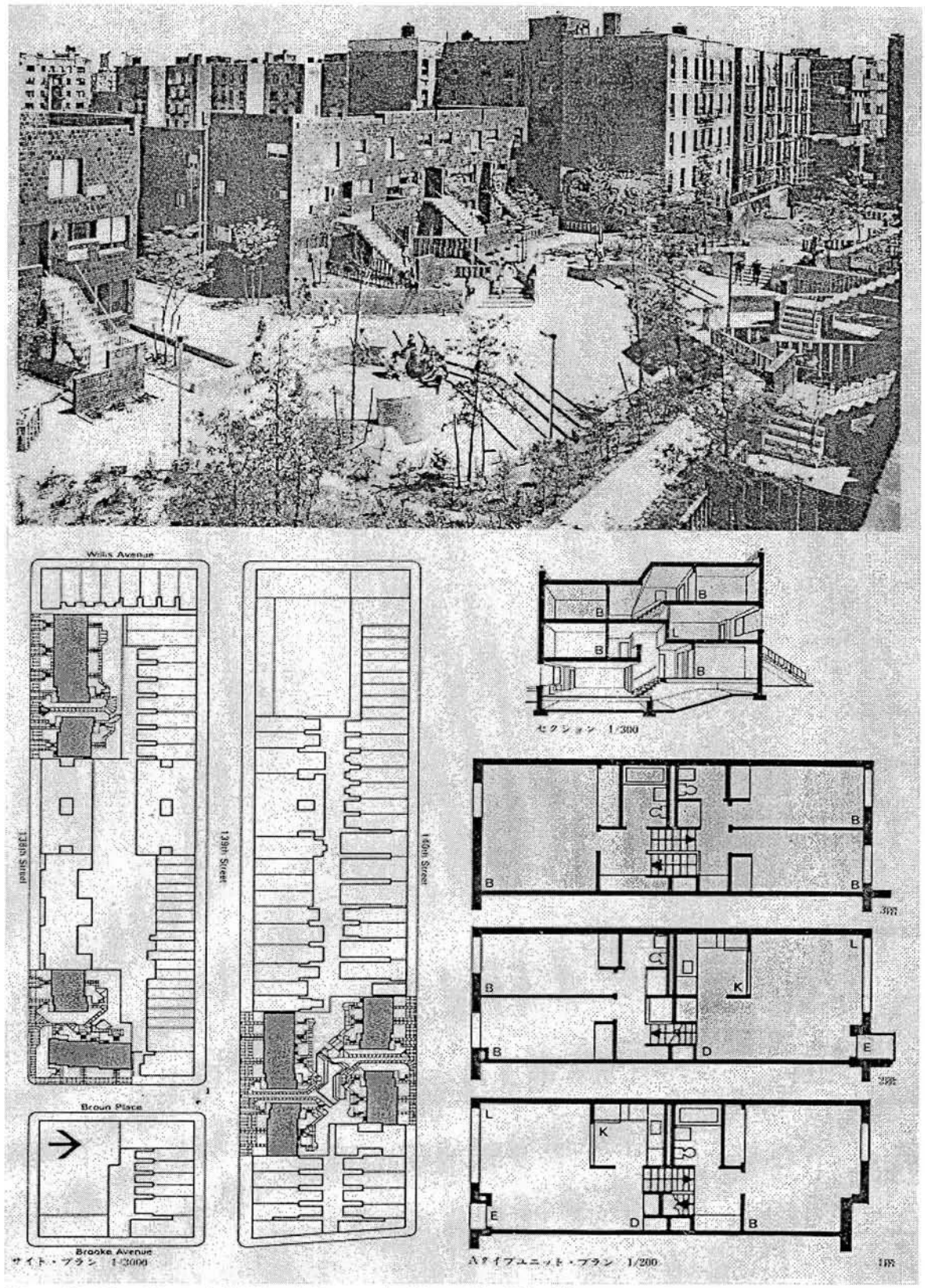


Figure 80: Mott Haven Infill, South Bronx, Architect: Ciardullo Ehmann

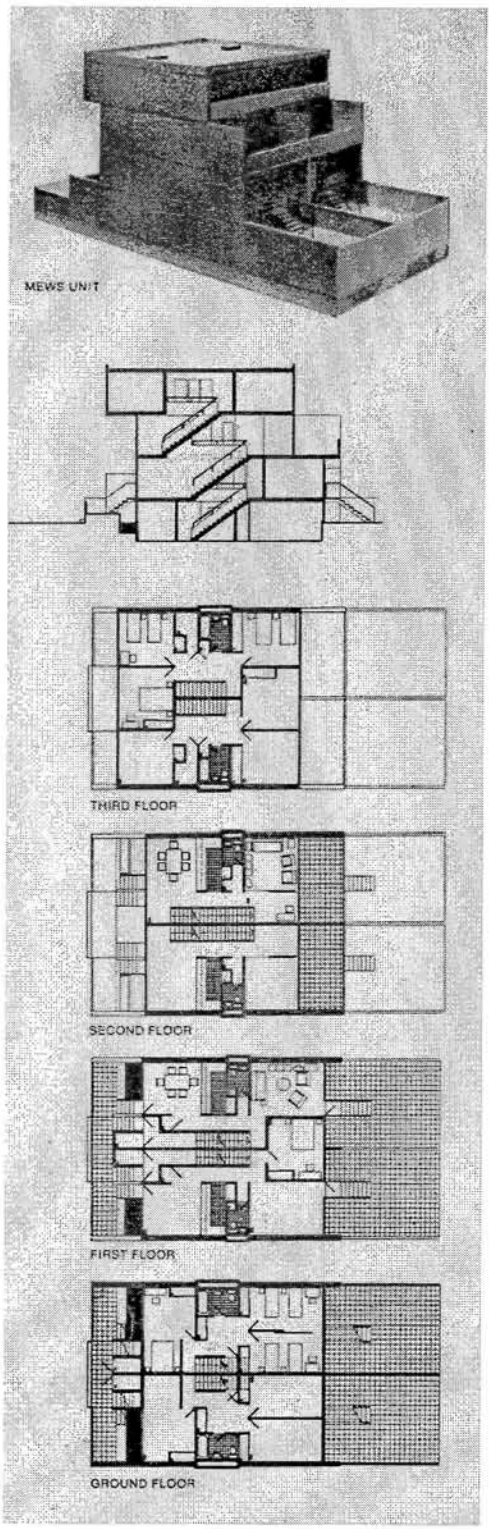


Figure 81: Low Rise, High-Density Prototype, Unit Plans, Section and Model.

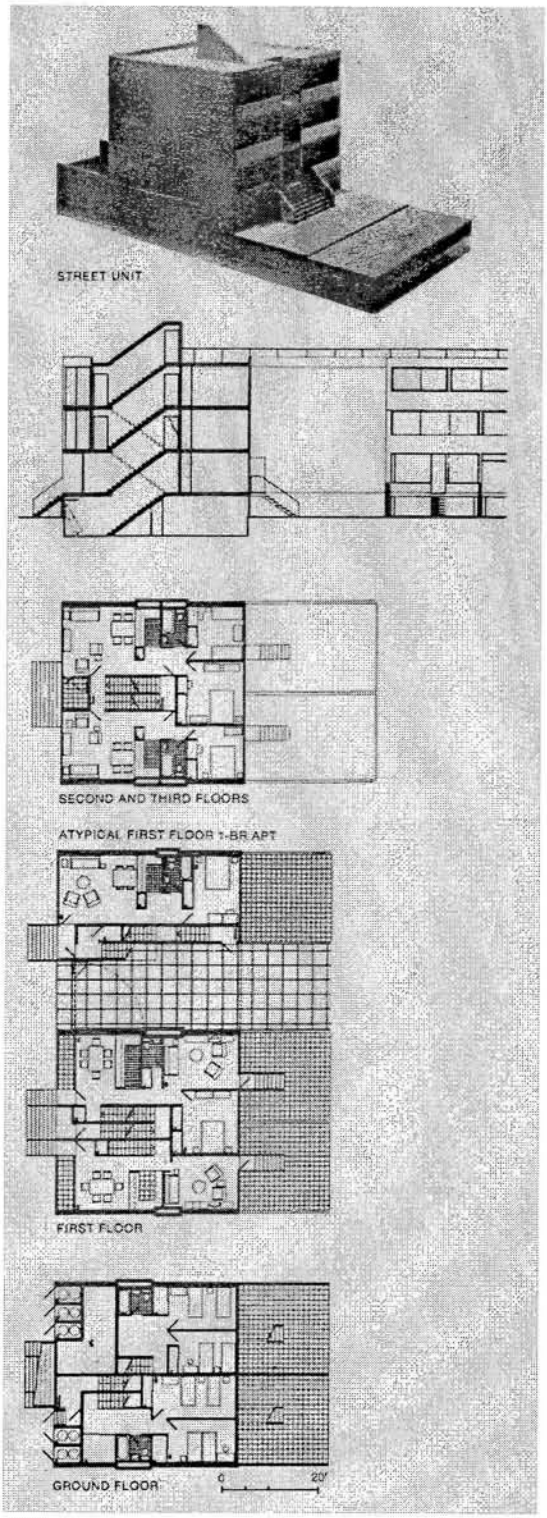


Figure 82: Low-Rise, High-Density Prototype, Unit Plans, Section and Model.

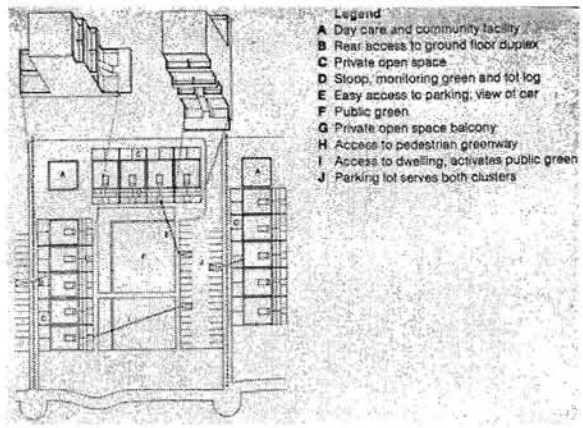


Figure 83: Fox Hills, Staten Island, Block Diagram.

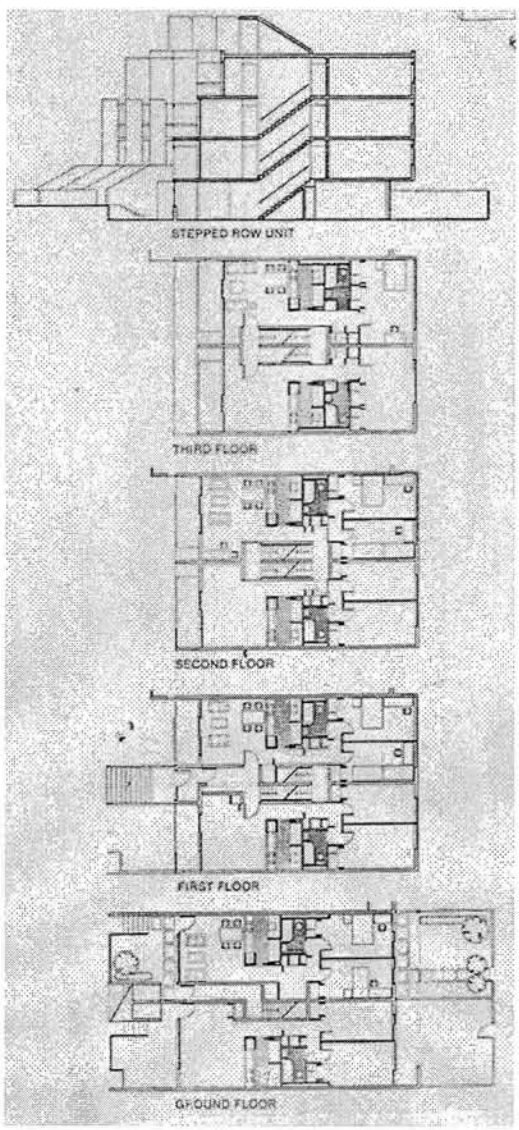


Figure 84: Fox Hills, Staten Island, Unit Prototype Plans and Section.

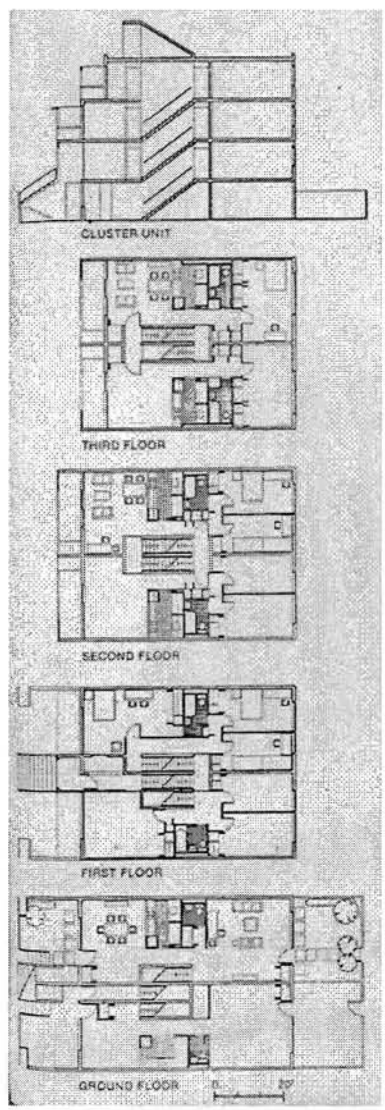


Figure 85: Fox Hills, Staten Island, Unit Prototype Plans and Section.

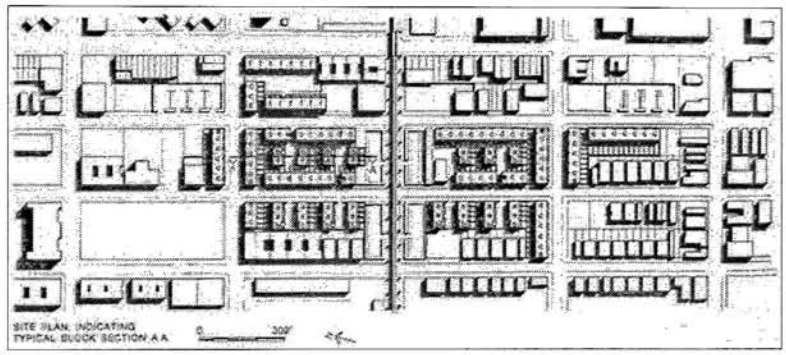


Figure 86: Marcus Garvey Park Village, Brooklyn, Site Plan.

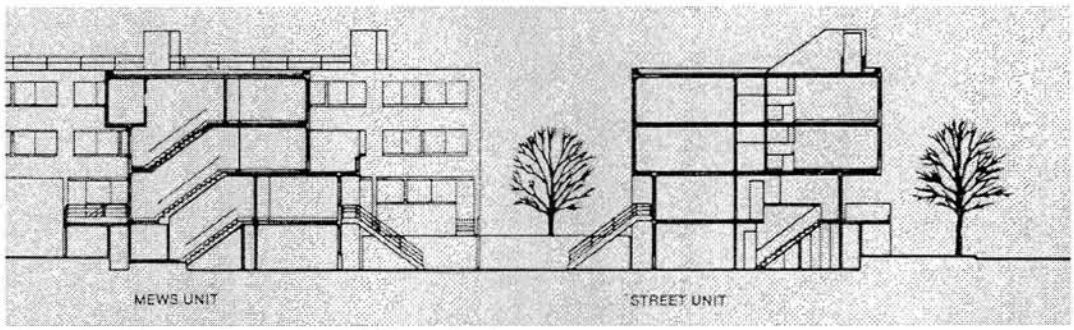


Figure 87: Marcus Garvey Park Village, Section.

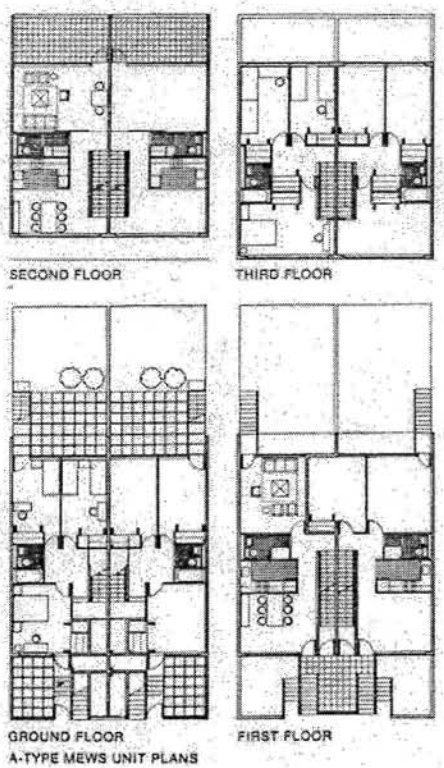


Figure 88: Marcus Garvey Park Village, Mews Unit Plans.

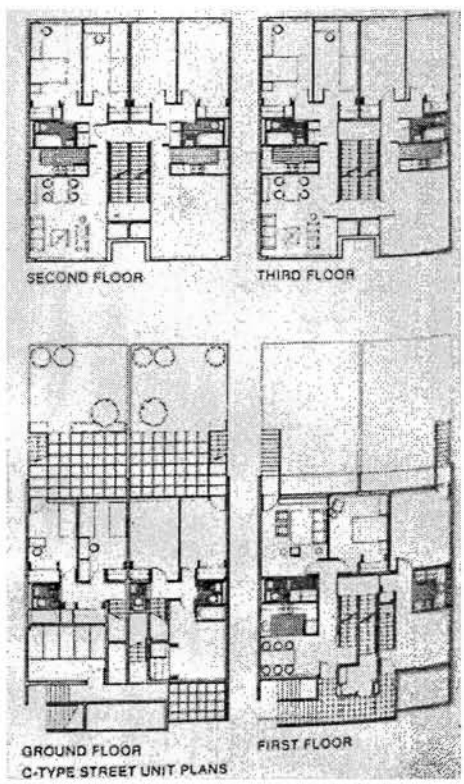


Figure 89: Marcus Garvey Park Village, Street Unit Plans.

There were several qualities in this housing prototype that were seen to actively promote a sense of community and "house". The four-story scale defines the public realm of urban space and street at a more intimate and identifiable scale to the individual than Roosevelt Island's existing higher-rise urban fabric. The smaller vertical scale also allows the individual to identify their house within the larger urban context. The strategy of designing an entry that is shared by four families enhances a sense of community by allowing for recurring interaction with a defined set of neighbors. The entry is also conceived as an identifiable "front porch/front door" (similar to Manhattan brownstone housing.) And the concept of apartment units based on a through-block design was explored in its potential to shape and define the public and private realms of this neighborhood.

The apartment design was also guided by the need to reinforce the urban fabric and provide housing that introduces light and air to as many living spaces as possible. An approach was taken in the development of this prototype package to vary the orientation of living and sleeping spaces of the units to face both the street and interior of the block. In general, the units are planned to allow for through-block views and ventilation, and to introduce natural light into as many spaces as possible. The first floor of the package contains the shared front-entry porch as well as a 2- bedroom flat. The second and third floors each contain a 3-bedroom flat, and the fourth floor a 2-bedroom flat (Figures 90 and 91).

The units' design is further manipulated to break down the scale of the street and block and

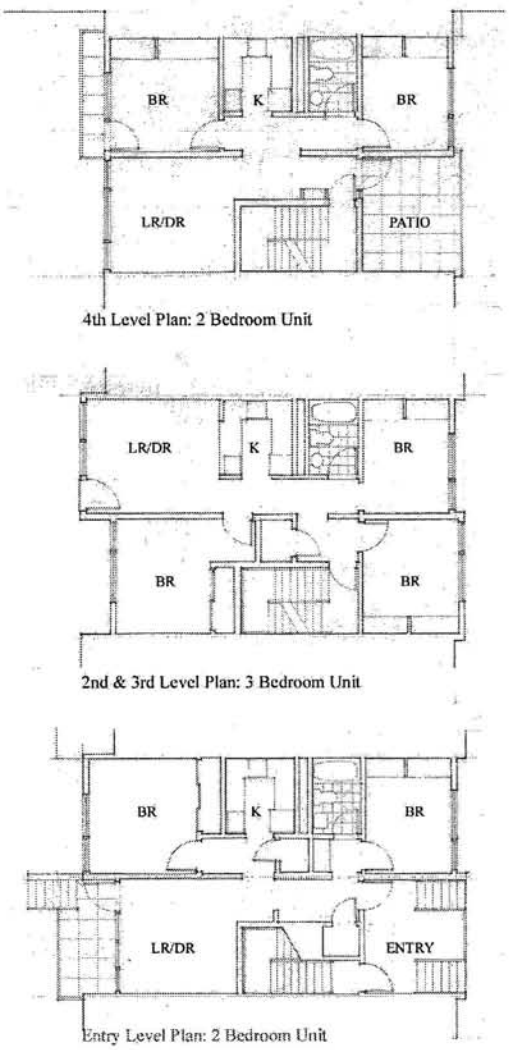


Figure 90: Units Plans, South Side of Residential Street.

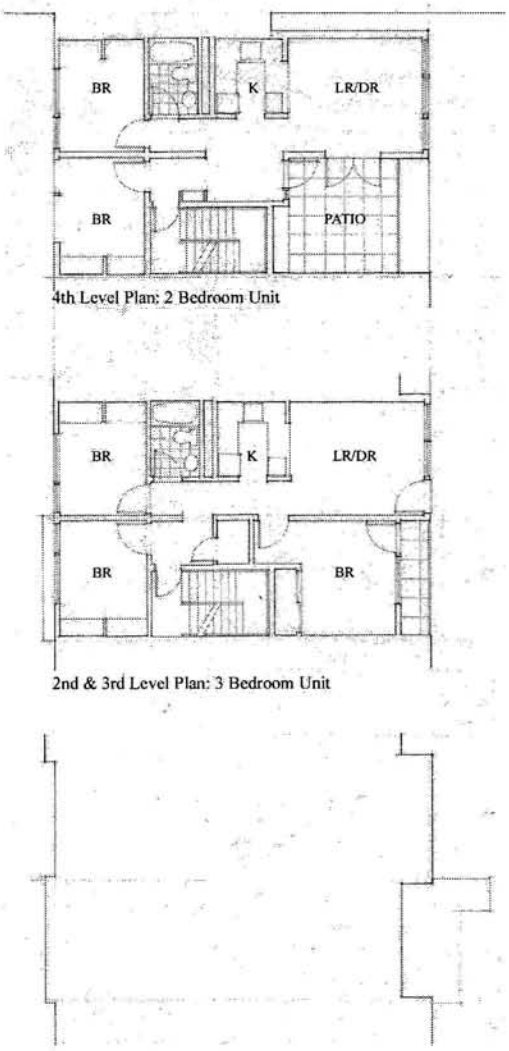


Figure 91: Unit Plans, North Side of Residential Street.

to differentiate the north and south facades. On the street side, the north face is relatively planar, with only the vertical surfaces of the package punctuated by the projecting volume of the front entry porch. On the south side of the street, the vertical surfaces are manipulated more, with every other bay protruding, and a large terrace at the top floor sculpting the

volume of the upper portion of the block (Figures 93 and 94). To the interior of the block, the north and south facades are sculpted in varying degrees through a series of small and large terraces that open off either living rooms or bedrooms.

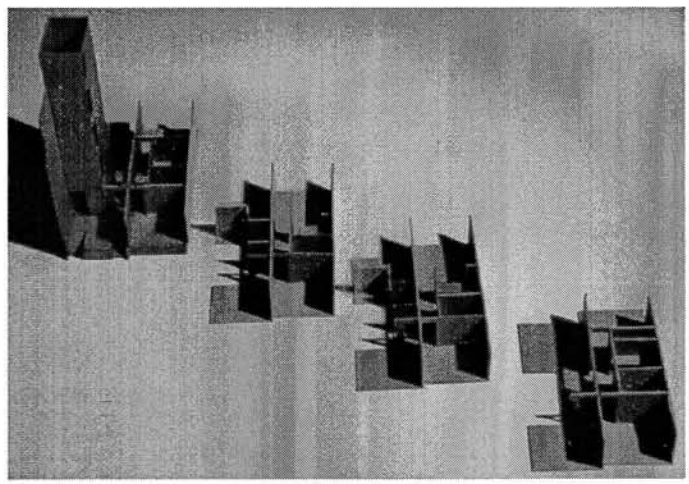


Figure 92: Prototype Study Model.

Figure 93: Prototype Elevations.

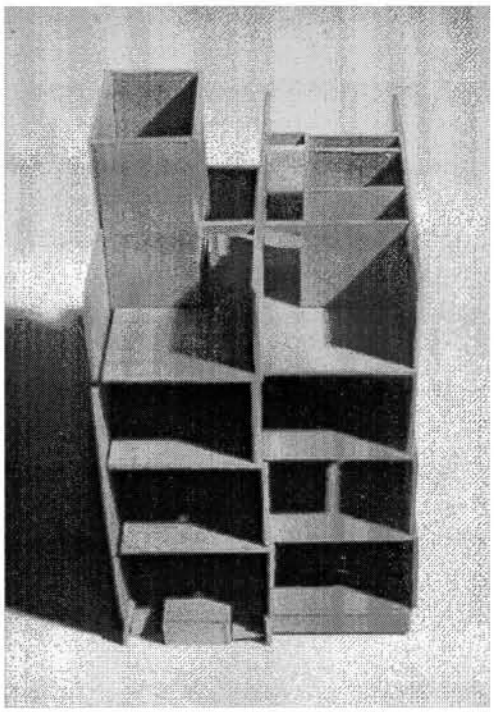


Figure 95: Prototype Study Model.

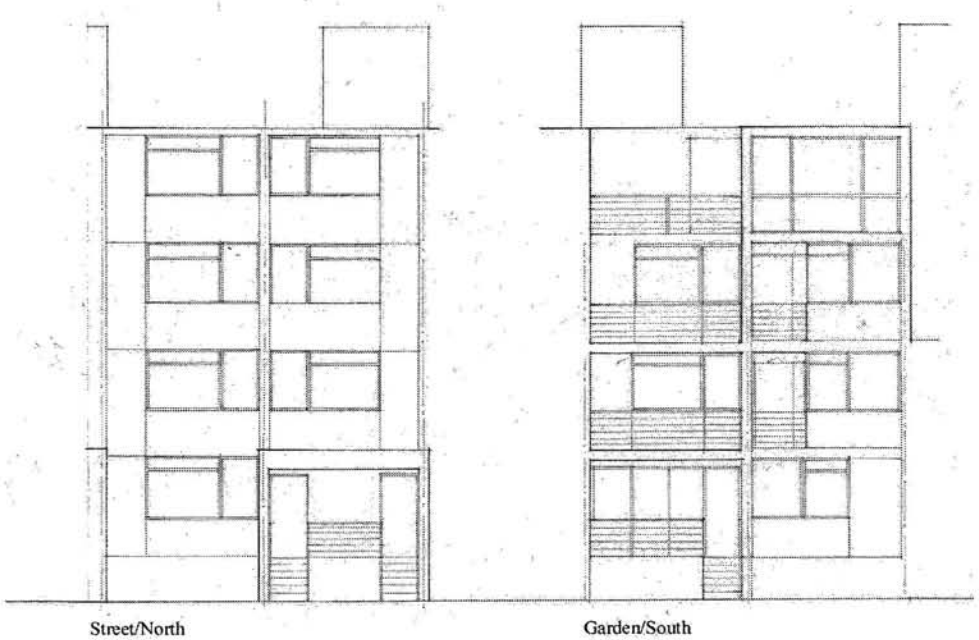


Figure 93: Housing Prototype Elevations.

EVALUATION/CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of the thesis, my intent had originally been to architecturally investigate the issues of making a community and housing as a conceptual, abstract, idealized study. However, when I encountered Roosevelt Island's compelling geography, urban planning history and housing prototype designs, it was difficult to consider the design of community and housing as an abstract structure, separate from this very specific context.

Compelling on its own was the fact that Roosevelt Island is an island, a piece of land surrounded by water, having a definitive physical boundary. Add to that the unique location of the island in the East River, in between the disparate contexts of Manhattan and Queens. Beyond Roosevelt Island's rich geographical context was the planned community that existed, and the ideals embodied in its planning and design. Roosevelt Island was made possible by a unique set of political and financial circumstances that allowed the UDC to play such a large role in its relatively quick development. As a result, the community as it existed previous to Manhattan Park's construction, was a snapshot of the unique social, architectural and planning ideals of the public works of the 1960's and 70's.

It was a community that had successfully integrated a social, economical and racial cross-section of society into its structure. As a planned "new town", it was a commentary on modern architectural and urban planning ideals. The community's existing housing, especially Sert Jackson & Associate's skillfully-designed Eastview and Westview complexes

(both as three-dimensional building compositions and as apartment unit designs) offered a strong precedent as a modern housing prototype.

With Roosevelt Island containing such a variety of uniquely compelling circumstances, the island itself was a constant influence in the focus and development of the design, and in the end influenced equally both the urban planning attitudes and the goals of the housing prototype investigation.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the exploration was defining the architectural construct of community at the two divergent scales of the overall urban design (macrocosm) and the housing prototype design (microcosm.) It was challenging to continually approach and balance the design from such diverse viewpoints. As a result, I feel some of the other issues important to the making of a community were not as successfully integrated into the design. For example, while the urban fabric's design was informed by the housing prototype design, the urban plan did not adequately address the role of civic buildings. The civic buildings are thought of at only a diagrammatic level; the opportunity existed to more fully explore the role the public realm has in defining both the community and the individual.

Another complex aspect of the thesis was designing the two different neighborhoods, South Town and North Town. Early in the investigation, the decision was made to create two different urban structures in the proposal, and explore creating neighborhoods differing in their density, structure and scale. The contrasts between the two neighborhoods was further

reinforced through the housing blocks' compositions. The South Town blocks were designed exclusively with the point-access, skip-stop housing prototype, while the North Town fabric was mostly composed with the low-rise, high-density housing prototype.

There was a conscious choice made during the design to develop the neighborhoods as counterpoints to one-another, in order to illustrate the divergent types of neighborhood that could exists within the new urban context. However, I believe that overall, North Town's urban and housing block structure was more successful than the South Town's in addressing the planning and architectural issues of making community and neighborhood.

In the South Town proposal, some elements of the design were more successful than others. The investigation of housing prototype itself was a challenge, and overall the design integrated the housing into urban blocks in a manner that gave the individual a sense of place within the block and the community. In addition, the basic urban strategies of introducing cross-streets as a counter-point to Main Street, creating a variety of public green spaces in the urban structure, and incorporating green space into the housing blocks were also effective.

Other aspects the South Town proposition were not as successful. While the volumetric composition of the urban blocks was considered, the proposal did not fully develop the facades, and study how the design of these vertical surfaces could impact the scale and quality of the community's urban structure. Overall, the urban and architectural scale of the

South Town development, and Main Street especially, became dense and rather oppressive. Also, the urban blocks were perhaps too homogeneous and did not fully define the differences between Main Street and the secondary cross streets, as well as the Manhattan and Queen's sides of the island. It may have been worthwhile to study other approaches to designing the blocks so that each one asserted an individual identity in the community.

North Town's design more successfully addressed some of the issues of making a community. The choice to design this neighborhood as a lower-density urban structure composed primarily of low-rise, walk-up housing blocks dramatically affected the quality of the community. Because of the more intimate scale of the neighborhood, it is easier for the individual to relate to the scale of the urban blocks, streets and public spaces. Similarly, the smaller scale of the housing prototypes also permitted the facade design to be more fully developed both on the street and court sides of the blocks.

However, while the facade design was more successful, the study would have benefitted in exploring both plan and facade proposals that would have allowed for more variety in the community's character. Like South Town's design, here too it would have been worthwhile to study the potential for the blocks within the neighborhood to assert an individual character.

As a whole, I consider one of most successful aspects of the thesis study the integration of parks and green spaces in the urban plan, both at the scale of the neighborhood blocks and at the scale of the housing prototypes. For the most part, the intent of exploring the role of

green space in the community was fulfilled. The urban plan integrated a wide variety and types of green spaces ranging from the park-like boulevard of the North Town neighborhood to the narrow green promenade that encircles Roosevelt Island's perimeter. Green spaces were also successfully integrated into the urban block design and also influence the development of the housing prototype design, perhaps most strongly and successfully in North Town's U-shaped blocks.

The other aspect of the thesis that was successful were the perspectives vignettes created to portray the individual's experience of the architecture of the proposed community, experiences that could not be fully represented in the analytical, abstract architectural drawings of the urban plans and housing prototypes. These perspective views were drawn to convey the quality of the streets, public parks and spaces, housing and urban structure. These drawings spoke more to the individual in the community, depicting the individual's spatial perception of the urban structure of the different neighborhoods, portraying the qualities of the streets and the public squares, and illustrating the experience of the public parks and the river-front promenade of the community. Hopefully, these drawings convey the less tangible, experiential qualities of community that the thesis' urban and architectural design aspired to create.

APPENDIX ONE
APARTMENT SIZE GUIDELINES

TABLE 7
HUD APARTMENT GUIDELINES

Apartment Type	Low-Income (sq. ft.)	HUD minimum (sq. ft.)
1 Bedroom	650	580
2 Bedroom	950	750
3 Bedroom	1,250	900

TABLE 8
FHA APARTMENT GUIDELINES

Apartment Type	Minimum Sq. Ft.	Maximum Sq. Ft.
0 Bedroom	300	500
1 Bedroom	500	650
2 Bedroom	650	1,000
3 Bedroom	800	1,200
4 Bedroom	1,200	1,500

TABLE 9
HOUSING & HOME FINANCE AGENCY APARTMENT GUIDELINES

Apartment Types	Minimum Sq. Ft.	Maximum Sq. Ft.
0 Bedroom	410	470
1 Bedroom	535	650
2 Bedroom	685	825
3 Bedroom	875	975
4 Bedroom	1,070	1,150

APPENDIX TWO
ROOSEVELT ISLAND, 1988 EXISTING HOUSING DATA

TABLE 10
EXISTING HOUSING APARTMENT UNIT DATA

Housing Development	**No. of Units**	**Comments**
Eastwood* Architect: Sert, Jackson & Associates	1,003	143 studios, 337 one-bedroom, 265 two-bedroom, 189 three-bedroom, and 69 four-bedroom units; elderly and low- and moderate- income units; complex also contains elementary school, daycare and senior center.
Rivercross* Architect: Johansen & Bhavnani	377	Co-ops; 35 studios, 95 one-bedroom, 125 two-bedroom, 114 three-bedroom, and 8 four-bedroom units.
Westview* Architect: Sert, Jackson & Associates	360	13 studios, 97 one-bedroom, 167 two-bedroom, and 84 three-bedroom units.
Island House* Architect: Johansen & Bhavnani	437	34 studios, 92 one-bedroom, 154 two-bedroom, 108 three-bedroom, and 12 four-bedroom units.
Manhattan Park Architect: Gruzen Samton Steinglass	1,108	Projected population of 2,300 when fully occupied.
TOTAL	3,285	

*Data on these housing units compiled from the Roosevelt Island Operating Corporation's Housing Characteristics Table, 1985.

APPENDIX THREE
RHODE ISLAND HOUSING DESIGN COMPETITION

This open competition was entered as an independent study, and its completion ran parallel to the thesis exploration of the housing prototypes. The purpose of the Rhode Island Housing Design Competition was to solicit ideas from architects to develop economical, two-family housing prototype for a typical urban lots in different cities in Rhode Island. Personally, the competition was used as a vehicle to explore transforming the housing prototype that incorporated the 1 ½ story living space as a detached 2-family housing unit, rather than a component of an urban block.

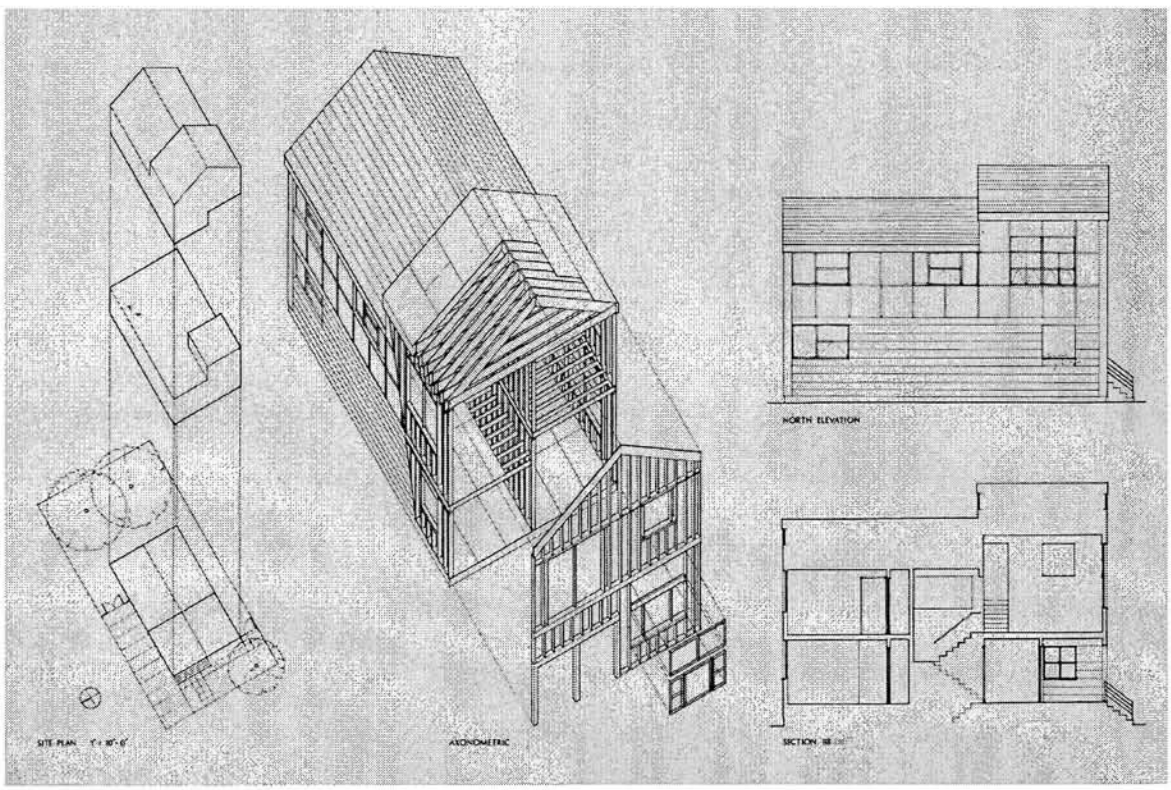


Figure 96: Rhode Island Housing Design Competition Entry, Panel 1.

For the Rhode Island competition, the challenge was to take the unit prototype I had developed during the thesis investigation and explore how it could be transformed to compose a two-family house. For the purposes of the competition, the prototype evolved into an interlocking 2 and 3 bedroom apartment contained within the housing unit. The solution integrates the previously developed apartment units in a simple rectangular box, with the added amenity of a shared front porch. The building facades and volume were developed and articulated to be sympathetic to the typical residential neighborhoods of the competition, which were a grid of streets containing detached single family and two-family wood-framed houses.

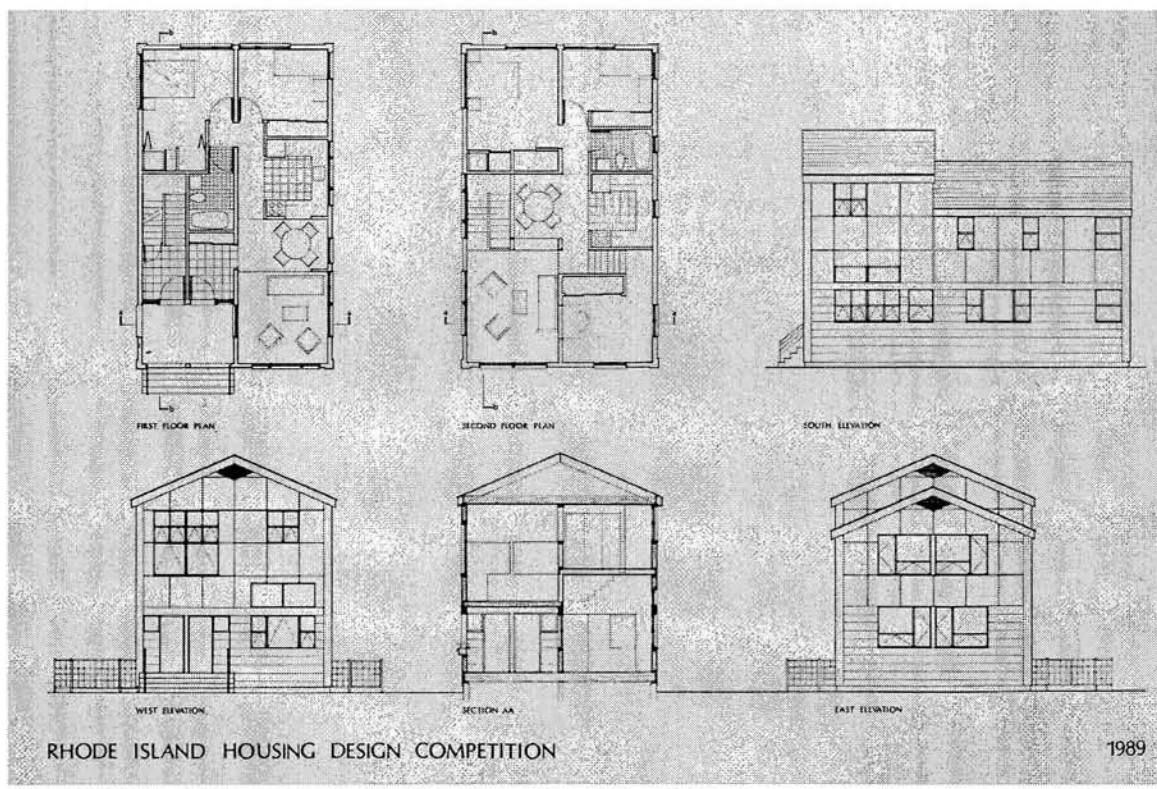


Figure 97: Rhode Island Housing Design Competition, Panel 2.

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